

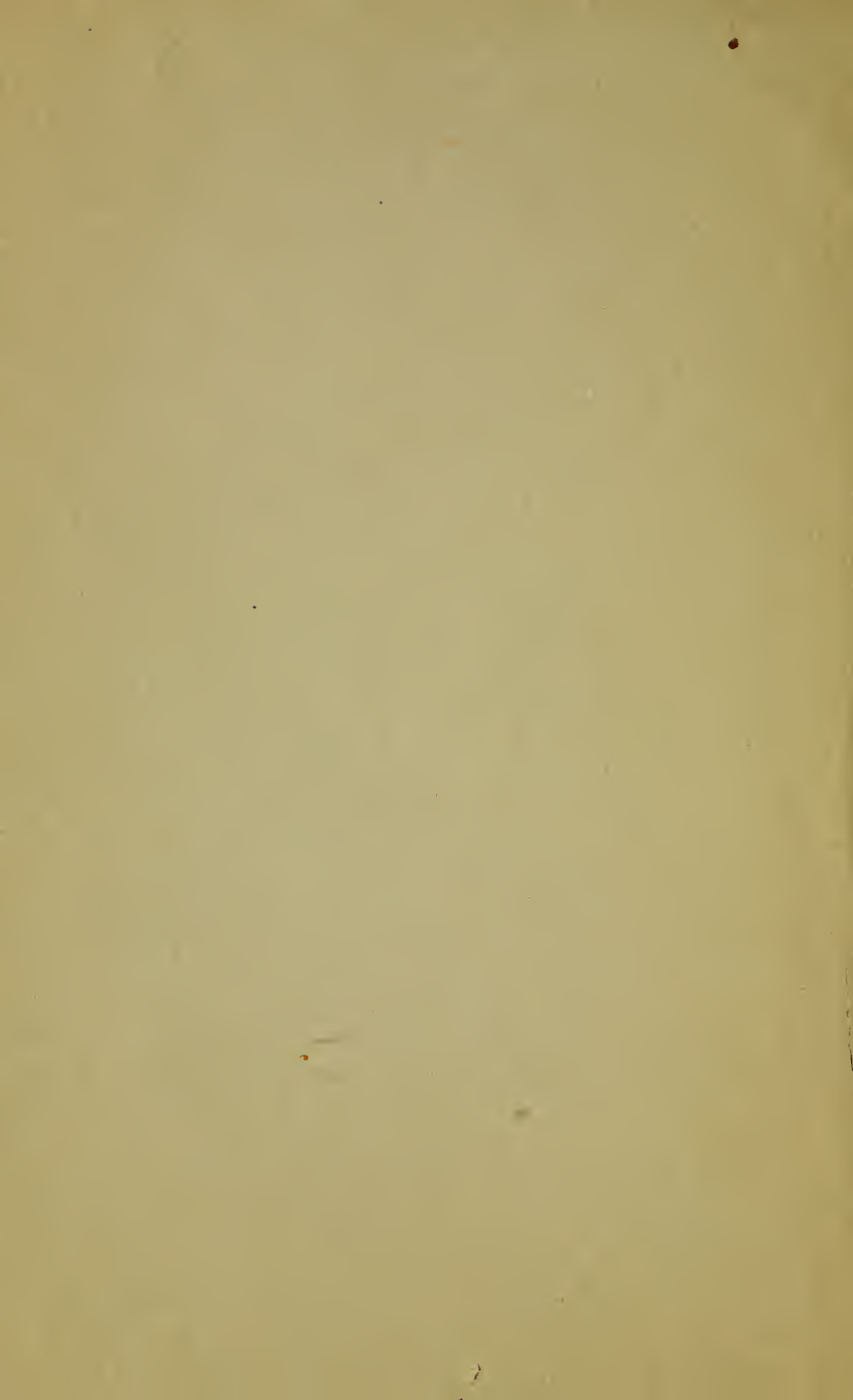
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ER SACRIFICE



DRAMA

BY EDMUND MITCHELL





HER SACRIFICE

Drama in Prologue and Three Acts

By EDMUND MITCHELL



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HER SACRIFICE

DRAMA IN PROLOGUE AND THREE ACTS

BY EDMUND MITCHELL

CHARACTERS OF THE PROLOGUE:

HENRY JAMES GARRISON A rich New Yorker.
PETER His colored servant.
MRS. GARRISON Wife of Mr. Garrison.
DONNA PERALTA From Valparaiso, Chile.
MARY CAREW Her protegee.

CHARACTERS OF THE PLAY:

JOHN SINGLETON Man of wealth and social reformer.
COUNT GASTON DE FAYE An adventurer.
DR. BRIDGES A scientist.
BROWN The Count's valet.
BABETTE A lady's maid.
MRS. SINGLETON Wife of Mr. Singleton.
MRS. LENNOX Her friend.
MARIA PERALTA, "LA STELLA" Mary Carew of the Prologue.
PROMENADERS AT THE CHARITY BAZAAR.

PLACE: NEW YORK.

TIME: THE PRESENT.

SCENES:

PROLOGUE. ABNEGATION.

RECEPTION CHAMBER IN THE GARRISON HOME.

TEN YEARS BEFORE THE PLAY.

ACT I. TEMPTATION.

THE CHARITY BAZAAR. MADISON GARDENS.

AFTERNOON.

ACT II. HALLUCINATION.

BOUDOIR IN LA STELLA'S HOTEL.

EVENING OF THE SAME DAY.

ACT III. REPARATION.

APARTMENT IN COUNT DE FAYE'S BACHELOR FLAT.

LATER IN THE SAME NIGHT.

THE PROLOGUE.

ABNEGATION.

SCENE: RECEPTION HALL IN THE GARRISON HOME.

DONNA PERALTA and PETER *are disclosed, the latter with a card tray in his hand. The Senora speaks with the slow deliberation of an educated foreigner, PETER with a flavor of negro dialect.*

DONNA. I can take no refusal. Mr. Garrison must see me.

PETER. I've told you, ma'am, Mr. Garrison is too sick to see anybody. DONNA (*taking her card from the tray, and penciling some words on it*).

Oh, he will make an effort when he reads this message.

PETER. I dasn't disturb him. I have my orders, ma'am.

DONNA (*significantly showing her pocketbook*). No orders need prevent your taking my card to him.

PETER. He'll be mad clean through, ma'am, if I wake him up. Always sleeps after his drive—doctor's orders. And Mr. Garrison, he ain't the most good-tempered man when things go contrary.

DONNA (*slipping a bill into his hand*). Perhaps this will pay you for the risk of his ill-temper.

PETER (*looking dubiously at the money*). Well, I'd like to oblige you, ma'am, gospel truth.

DONNA. Then take my message.

PETER (*pocketing the money*). Ther'll be trouble. He'll fly clean off the handle sure.

DONNA. But first, please, go out to my carriage, and ask the lady to come here. Tell her that Mr. Garrison is at home.

PETER. But I've just been saying, ma'am, that he ain't at home to visitors.

DONNA. Nonsense. He will receive us. Do as you are told.

(*Exit PETER, reluctantly.*)

DONNA. A pretty idea, indeed, that we should be turned away with that absurd formula, that polite society fiction, "Not at home," after traveling thousands of miles for the very object of this interview. The American senor is ill, has been very ill, so everyone says. But he is well enough now to take his daily drive, and will assuredly be well enough to see us when he reads that message on my card.

(MARY CAREW *is ushered in by PETER, who bows, hesitating, tray still in hand.*)

DONNA. Ah, Mary, my dear, come along. (*To PETER.*) My card, now.

PETER. I guess I'll have to. She's a bit too bossy for me.

(*Exit.*)

MARY (*pale, agitated, but determined*). He is at home?

DONNA (*with a little laugh*). Well, he is "Not at Home," but that means he is here all the same.

MARY. And he will see us?

DONNA. I for one don't leave this house until he does.

MARY. What is the message you have sent?

DONNA. My card.

MARY. But he will not know your name.

DONNA. I have written my address.

MARY. Our hotel in New York?

DONNA. No, my home address in Valparaiso. He will not know my name, but he will realize quickly enough that a lady has not come all the way from Chile for the pleasure of talking to him about the weather or the flower show.

MARY. Yes, the very mention of Chile should strike terror into his soul. But he may show himself too much of a coward, too utterly ashamed, to face—here—anyone from down there.

DONNA. He will have to get over his cowardice and his shame, then,

for this day he has to face *me*.

MARY. Hush! I hear someone coming.

DONNA. Yes. Now, my dear, be brave. This is the hour for which we have waited so long.

(*Enter MRS. GARRISON, ushered in by PETER. MARY turns away to the window, to conceal her agitation.*)

PETER (*in formal announcement*). Mrs. Henry James Garrison.

(*Exit.*)

MRS. GARRISON (*holding DONNA PERALTA's card in her hand*). Senora Peralta, I presume?

DONNA (*bowing*). That is my name, madame.

MRS. GARRISON. And your companion?

DONNA. Is my friend.

MRS. GARRISON. Won't you sit down?

DONNA. Pardon me, there is a misunderstanding—some mistake. We have called to see Mr. Garrison.

MRS. GARRISON. So I have been informed. But please allow me a few words first. Be seated.

(*MRS. GARRISON and DONNA PERALTA sit down. MARY continues to stand at the window, with face averted.*)

Your card says you come from Valparaiso.

DONNA. That is so.

MRS. GARRISON. Mr. Garrison, I believe, spent several months in Chile, some three or four years ago—before we were married. But he never cares to speak about it now.

(*MARY shrugs her shoulders significantly but MRS. GARRISON, without noticing, continues.*)

Still I know he has been in South America.

DONNA (*gravely*). And for that reason, madame, we are here today.

MRS. GARRISON (*nervously*). I hope you don't bring bad news.

DONNA. When trouble is left behind, bad news usually follows—sooner or later.

MRS. GARRISON. Trouble? (*Glancing at MARY.*) I trust no serious trouble. You have been told that Mr. Garrison has been sick—sick almost to death.

DONNA. So we have heard.

MRS. GARRISON. And the doctors are still very anxious about him. In his shattered state of health he is hardly fit to receive bad news. That is why I intercepted your card, and came here myself.

DONNA. I am afraid Mr. Garrison must see us, however unpleasant the ordeal.

MRS. GARRISON. The unexpected announcement of visitors from Valparaiso—from that part of the world of all places—will come to him as a shock.

DONNA. We cannot help that.

MRS. GARRISON. But can't I prepare my husband in any way for this interview?

DONNA. I am truly sorry, madame, to seem to insist. But we must see Mr. Garrison before we can speak to anyone on the painful business that brings us here.

MRS. GARRISON. Painful business? Oh, forgive what may look to you like intrusion into my husband's private affairs. But I am a woman—a woman who has seen much of sorrow and trouble—(*in lower voice*)—whose own life has not been without sorrow and trouble. (*Tremulously.*) Alas! it is my misfortune that I can guess something of what this painful story is going to be.

MARY (*observing her emotion, aside*). Ah, then, she too knows the man—the true character of the man.

MRS. GARRISON. But he is ill. Whatever has happened in the past, we must all remember that he is now ill, and that any sudden shock might mean—might have very serious consequences.

DONNA. All the same, he has got to hear the truth. What you say about his state of health only makes it the more urgent that there should be no delay.

MRS. GARRISON. But cannot I break the news to him? Cannot the blow first fall on me? See, I do not spare myself, however much I may shrink from it all. My only wish is to prevent needless misery for those who are innocent of all wrong.

MARY (*turning round, and passionately*). No, no; you must not interfere. You must not mix yourself up in this affair. It is mine, and mine alone.

MRS. GARRISON. Poor girl. You have been—you are in trouble.

MARY (*to herself, bitterly*). Trouble! Oh poverty-stricken word!

MRS. GARRISON. Cannot I help you in any way?

MARY. Help me? You help me? No, no. You are the last of all from whom to think of help.

MRS. GARRISON. But a woman's sympathy may sometimes soften a woman's sorrow.

MARY. Sympathy! From you? That is impossible. I would not ask it; you must not offer it.

MRS. GARRISON. You do not know, perhaps, my poor child, that I am accustomed to hear pitiful stories. A great deal of my time is spent among those who have been unfortunate in the hard battle of the world and require a kindly word of encouragement on their way.

MARY (*affected*). Yes, yes, I know. All New York speaks of how your life is devoted to good works of every kind. But that is the more reason why you should keep yourself apart from me. (*She covers her face with her hands, and sobs.*)

MRS. GARRISON (*to DONNA PERALTA*). Her words frighten me. You have come to see my husband. Tell me this: is it at his hands that this unhappy girl has suffered?

DONNA (*rising*). I cannot answer you, madame. I assure you it is with Mr. Garrison, and not with you, that we must speak. (*Going to MARY.*) Courage, dear; patience. Yet a little longer now, and the wrong will be set right.

MRS. GARRISON (*to herself*). Oh, what am I to do? I dread this interview. God help me, I dread it. (*Leans over her chair, with her hand to her forehead.*)

MARY (*to DONNA PERALTA*). Yes, wrong may be set right. But think. Right for *me* will mean dishonor and shame—for *her*.

DONNA. You have to consider your own honor and your own good name, my child.

MARY (*musingly*). There may be others to consider—the others she referred to, who are innocent of all wrong.

DONNA. Since time began, the innocent have always had to suffer with the guilty.

MARY. She has a child.

DONNA. But a child must not stand between you and your good name.

MARY (*glancing pityingly at MRS. GARRISON*). She may have been thinking of her little child.

DONNA. Don't, I beg of you, reopen the painful conversation with her. It can do no good. Reserve your strength for the interview with him.

MARY. No, no; you must not prevent me. I must hear something of her story from her own lips—my fellow victim at his hands.

DONNA. It is unwise.

MARY (*to MRS. GARRISON*). Mrs. Gar—(*falters in pronouncing the name*).

MRS. GARRISON. Well? Are you better now?

MARY (*with forced composure*). Yes, thank you; I am better—a little more composed. Excuse my having broken down. But you see I have suffered a great deal.

MRS. GARRISON. Poor girl, I am sorry for you, I am indeed, from the bottom of my heart.

MARY (*with an attempt at cheerfulness*). But there, I am myself again, and with your permission I would ask you some questions.

MRS. GARRISON. Questions?

MARY. Yes. Rest assured, it is not mere idle curiosity that prompts me. But I do wish you to tell me one or two things.

MRS. GARRISON. And what may these be?

MARY. You were married to Mr. Garrison, I believe, three years ago.

MRS. GARRISON (*with a faint sigh*). Yes, nearly three years ago.

MARY. And your marriage has been an unhappy one.

MRS. GARRISON (*indignantly*). How dare you say such a thing—to me—here—in my own home?

MARY. The world says so.

MRS. GARRISON. The world has too often a malicious tongue.

MARY. But forgive me if I tell you that your own words, your manner, your looks, have revealed to me the truth about your married life.

MRS. GARRISON (*haughtily*). You are pretty sharp-sighted then. But I must ask you to leave the subject alone. My private life is my own.

MARY. And your public life?

MRS. GARRISON. That's another matter.

MARY. Well, the world says that you are good, that you devote yourself to works of charity and deeds of self-sacrifice—that your days are spent in succoring the poor, rescuing the fallen, tending the sick, comforting the dying.

MRS. GARRISON. The world is very generous. It speaks too kindly of my poor efforts to mitigate the misery I see around me.

MARY. In good works abroad there may be consolation—for unhappiness at home.

MRS. GARRISON (*coldly*). Are you not returning to a forbidden subject?

MARY. Then let us speak of something else. You have a child.

MRS. GARRISON (*with a smile*). That is better. Yes, I have a child—a baby boy, just two years old.

MARY. And you love him?

MRS. GARRISON. What a question to ask a mother! Love him? He is the darling of my heart, the joy of my life—(*sotto voce, sadly*) the one great gift my marriage has bestowed on me. (*Changing her tone, and moving towards a side cabinet.*) Let me show you the photograph of my little son.

MARY (*to DONNA PERALTA*). And this, senora, is the woman I would crush, whose heart is so full of goodness and love. Can I bring her shame and sorrow? Can I rob her of her name? Can I rob her innocent little child of his?

DONNA. But, Mary, you owe a duty to yourself.

MARY. Yes, and that duty may be—self-sacrifice and self-effacement.

MRS. GARRISON (*advancing, with photo in hand*). Here is the picture of my boy. Isn't he a darling?

MARY (*to herself*). His child! (*She turns away with repugnance.*)

DONNA. He is certainly a beautiful boy. And so like his mother.

MRS. GARRISON. Yes. Everyone notices the resemblance. I am glad he is like me. But his father, I must say, is very proud of his little lad, and devotedly attached to him. Have you ever observed how love for a child may develop in man or woman hidden traits of goodness?

MARY. And give one touch of redemption, perhaps, to a character that is otherwise wholly vile.

(*MRS. GARRISON turns away in confusion, dropping to her side the hand that holds the photo.*)

DONNA (*to MARY*). See, now, you have hurt her feelings again.

MARY. Forgive me, oh, forgive me. I did not mean to wound you like that.

MRS. GARRISON. You have no right to make such insinuations. Certainly

I don't wish to listen to them. (*To DONNA PERALTA.*) There, I'll take your card to my husband.

MARY. Oh, don't go away like this. I know I have been cruel and unkind. But my mind is distracted—I am not myself—I'm so utterly miserable.

MRS. GARRISON. I pity you with all my heart. I would comfort you if you would only give me your confidence and let me try.

MARY. May I look at the picture of your son? (*Examines photo fixedly, then points to a name written on it, in great surprise.*) But what is this? How does this name come to be here?

MRS. GARRISON. John Singleton? Why, of course, these are my little boy's Christian names.

MARY. Your boy's names?

MRS. GARRISON. Yes; he is called after his uncle, my brother.

MARY. Your brother? Then before your marriage you were——

MRS. GARRISON. Grace Singleton.

MARY (*aside*). God above! His sister Grace!

MRS. GARRISON (*to DONNA PERALTA*). She is turning faint again, I am afraid.

MARY (*aside*). John Singleton—his sister, the wife of this man. (*Sinks in chair, overcome.*)

DONNA. You are unwell, dear. All this is too much for you.

MARY. Oh, let us go away from this house, for Heaven's sake, let us go away. Did you hear that name?

DONNA. What name?

MARY. I told you the whole story of my life. Do you not remember that name—John Singleton?

DONNA. What? Your former betrothed?

MARY. Yes, yes. She is his sister. She used to be abroad at school, in Germany, and we never met.

DONNA. Oh, what a complication.

MARY. Take me away, I beg of you, take me away.

MRS. GARRISON (*advancing*). You are really suffering. Can I get you a glass of wine?

MARY (*shuddering*). No, no. Do not come near me. Let me leave this house.

MRS. GARRISON (*to DONNA PERALTA*). Poor, poor girl. She must have endured much unhappiness.

DONNA. Few sadder stories than hers. And the worst of it all is that one broken heart, one shattered life, always breaks other hearts, shatters other lives as well.

MARY (*endeavoring to control herself*). Before I go, will you be good enough to tell me something—about—your brother?

MRS. GARRISON. My brother? Mr. Singleton? Then you know him? You have met him?

MARY (*faintly*). I have heard his name. Where is he now?

MRS. GARRISON. In Switzerland. He is on his honeymoon. He was married only last month.

MARY (*agitated*). Married! On his honeymoon! (*To herself.*) Tush! how could I have expected anything else? (*To MRS. GARRISON.*) And is he happy?

MRS. GARRISON. You certainly ask strange questions. Happy? Yes, I think he is very happy—happy in his marriage with a very lovely girl. Dear fellow, he deserves all the happiness coming to him; for he too, like all of us, had had his disappointments in life—and his disillusionments.

MARY. Disillusionments?

MRS. GARRISON. Yes, disillusionments and disappointments—or perhaps I should rather say, he had one great sorrow that clouded his life for years.

MARY. And what was that?

MRS. GARRISON. Well, you touch on a painful story. I hardly know why I should speak about it now, and to you.

MARY. Sorrow brings all who sorrow very close together. What was his misfortune?

MRS. GARRISON. Really, now——

DONNA. I think, madame, you should answer her question, strange although it may seem. Later on you will doubtless understand.

MRS. GARRISON. Well, my brother is happily married now, I am thankful to say. But some years ago he was engaged to somebody else.

MARY. Yes, yes.

MRS. GARRISON. One whom he loved devotedly. I never saw her, for I was away then, at school in Dresden. But I believe she was very beautiful, and we all thought her good. However—it was a miserable affair—she proved to be worthless.

MARY. Worthless!

MRS. GARRISON. Yes, she did worse than merely break her engagement almost on the eve of the wedding day. She ran away to become the mistress of some rich man.

MARY (*aside, hissing the word*). Mistress! Good heavens! That is what he believed of me.

MRS. GARRISON. We never heard much about the story—we never cared to enquire. But the blow nearly killed poor John; for months he was in a hospital. (*To DONNA PERALTA*). Time, however, heals most sorrows, as your experience of life doubtless tells.

MARY (*turning aside*). And that is what I lost, that is the love I threw away.

MRS. GARRISON (*to DONNA PERALTA*). But why should I have been asked for this story? Has this girl ever met my brother? What is her name? You have not yet told me her name.

DONNA (*moving away*). I must not tell you. (*To MARY, who is sobbing*.) Mary, don't cry like that.

MRS. GARRISON (*to herself*). Why does she come here, to see my husband, speaking about my brother? What does it all mean? In Heaven's name, what does it mean?

(*Enter MR. GARRISON, a feeble wreck of a man, walking with the aid of a cane.*)

GARRISON (*testily*). Oh, you are not alone, Grace?

DONNA (*to MARY*). Mr. Garrison.

MARY (*becoming instantly erect, but continuing to keep her face averted*). At last!

GARRISON. Visitors here? I was not told of this.

MRS. GARRISON. Visitors for you, Mr. Garrison. I was coming to prepare you for this interview. Are you well enough to receive these ladies? (*She hands him DONNA PERALTA's card.*)

GARRISON (*aside, reading card, in great agitation*). From Valparaiso! Good God! (*To MRS. GARRISON*). Grace, my dear, I am well enough to attend to this—ahem—little matter of business. Please leave us alone.

(*MRS. GARRISON hesitates.*)

DONNA (*her arm around MARY*). Yes, yes, go, for goodness sake go. You will know everything soon enough.

MRS. GARRISON (*to DONNA PERALTA*). Then, for the present, madame, good-bye. (*To MARY*.) Poor child, God pity you. Remember, whatever your story, I shall be your friend. (*Goes to door.*)

MARY (*to herself*). God pity you. Perhaps it is you who need a friend in me.

MRS. GARRISON (*at door*). There is some frightful mystery in all this. (*Exit.*)

GARRISON (*coldly, to DONNA PERALTA*). Your card informs me, senora, that you come from Valparaiso. To what do I owe the—ah—pleasure of your visit here?

DONNA. In Chile the rich Americano, Henry James Garrison, was known as plain Senor Smith.

GARRISON. Well, and what of that?

DONNA. I shall come to the point at once, sir. You had a lady with you in Chile—your wife, your then wife, not the lady who now bears your name.

GARRISON. What right have you to interfere in such matters? The lady you speak of died. Moreover, (*brutally*) she was not my wife.

DONNA. Before the world she passed as such.

GARRISON. Pshaw! South American morality, my dear lady.

DONNA. Not at all, sir. You married that young woman and in your proper name, although, for some plausible pretext you devised, she consented to share with you while in South America the incognito of Smith.

GARRISON (*agitated*). This is nonsense. Where did you pick up such an absurd tale?

DONNA. Nonsense? An absurd tale? We shall see presently about that. You left that lady, your wife, to die in an obscure little village in Chile.

GARRISON. She was dead when I went away.

DONNA. That is false. She was basely deserted by you, when ill and apparently at death's door. She was abandoned by her husband—to die among strangers.

GARRISON (*with a grim smile*). Well, be it so. She died among strangers.

DONNA. She did not. She lived. She lives now. She is here.

(*MARY confronts him.*)

GARRISON (*tottering, and grasping back of chair*). My God, Mary!

MARY. Yes, Mary. Risen from the dead—to avenge her wrongs, to punish your crimes.

DONNA. Let me finish, senor. I am the widow of General Peralta, and it was to my home in Valparaiso that your poor, deserted, fever-stricken wife, after two years of poverty and suffering, found her way.

GARRISON (*with hand to face*). Then she did not die, she did not die.

DONNA. I heard her story, I proved her worthy, and I have brought her here to claim her own.

MARY. And I have come, sir, to find you married to another woman.

DONNA. A bigamist, a felon in the eye of the law, a man who should be housed, not in this splendid mansion, but in a prison cell.

GARRISON. Oh, don't speak like that. Mary, spare me. I am sick and ill.

MARY. I was sick and ill, and you did not spare me. I was young and innocent, engaged to a truly noble man, when I first saw your accursed face. I should have been a happy woman now had you never crossed my path.

GARRISON. Spare me. At sight of you I am already punished. I thought you were dead.

MARY. Dead, in circumstances that should have haunted you for the rest of your days. In thought, if not in deed, you were my murderer.

GARRISON. No, no, not that.

MARY. Yes, my murderer. When you left me to die—left me hoping that I should die—you were as guilty of murder in the sight of God as if you had strangled the breath out of my body with your own hands.

GARRISON. Mary, Mary, do not speak like that.

MARY. But you have not suffered even a day's remorse. You have gone on in your callous career of crime. You have seized upon another unsuspecting, helpless victim.

GARRISON. What is that you say?

MARY. You have dragged down another innocent woman to infamy. You have married again.

GARRISON (*with some dignity*). Silence. If you will not spare my name, spare at least that of my wife.

MARY. Your wife? Am not I your wife?

GARRISON. But Mrs. Garrison?

MARY. Am not I Mrs. Garrison?

GARRISON (*pressing hands to brow*). Good God, it is true! If this story goes out to the world, Grace will be dishonored, and my boy—

MARY. Yes, your boy.

GARRISON. My son, my heir!

DONNA. An illegitimate.

GARRISON (*distracted*). Don't utter such a word. Oh, there must be no scandal of this kind. Mary, listen to me. I know I treated you badly—shamefully, no doubt. But as there is a God above, I believed you to be dead. And I have suffered—ah, how I have suffered—since those days in South America. Look at the wreck of a man I am.

MARY. You are the wreck your own wicked life has made you.

GARRISON. But there is one thing left to me in this world—one thing to which I cling.

MARY. Your love of self.

GARRISON. My boy, my little boy. I may not have his mother's love—I am unworthy of that. But I have the love of my innocent child.

MARY. And are you worthy of the love of an innocent child?

GARRISON. Pity my son, if you will not pity me.

DONNA. It may be truest pity for the son to save him from the evil influence of such a father.

MARY. You did not pity me.

GARRISON. Oh, you are hard and cruel. You wring my very soul.

MARY. It is what you deserve. It is what my just vengeance demands.

GARRISON. Your vengeance? Mary, for the sake of old days you can not do this. You will spare my child.

MARY. What is your child to me?

GARRISON. And you will spare the mother of my child? She has done no wrong. Poor, poor Grace!

MARY (*to herself*). Grace—Singleton; John Singleton's sister. Yes, perhaps, Grace Singleton should be spared.

DONNA (*intervening*). You will be true to yourself, Mary. He pleads with you to spare others, only that you may spare his cowardly, guilty self.

GARRISON. Do not interfere between us, woman. Get away from this.

DONNA. Mary, reflect well.

GARRISON. Silence, you cruel-hearted wretch. But for you, she would be merciful.

DONNA (*disregarding him*). Does a good woman like Mrs. Garrison lose anything by being rid of such a husband as—this? Have we not found it easy to see for ourselves that any love she ever had for—the creature, is gone?

GARRISON (*savagely*). Creature! You withered hag! I will thrust you out of the house with my own hands.

DONNA. Mary, in justice, and in justice alone, will lie the greatest good for all—right for you, rescue for them, punishment for him.

GARRISON. You damned—

MARY (*after a pause*). So let it be! Justice!

GARRISON (*in frenzy*). Exposure, shame for my wife before all the world, shame for my child?

DONNA. Justice!

GARRISON (*to DONNA PERALTA*). Curse you—a thousand curses on your head! (*He clutches at his heart, and gasps for breath.*)

MARY. He is ill. Look, look. He is ill.

GARRISON (*faintly*). Get me brandy.

DONNA. Help, help! (*Re-enter MRS. GARRISON.*) Help! See; Mr. Garrison.

GARRISON. Brandy, brandy.

MRS. GARRISON. Oh, oh! These spasms again. Henry, Henry, what has happened?

GARRISON. I am dying.

(MRS. GARRISON rings bell. Re-enter PETER.)

MRS. GARRISON. Quick. Bring brandy.

(Exit PETER.)

(Clasping her hands.) The doctors said the next attack would surely prove fatal.

GARRISON (*very faintly*). Brandy.

MRS. GARRISON. Oh, will Peter never come?

(Exit by the same door as PETER.)

GARRISON. Mary—pity—mercy. Spare her. She is a noble woman. I am dying. Spare her—spare my boy.

(Re-enter MRS. GARRISON, with a decanter and glass.)

MRS. GARRISON. There; drink a little. (GARRISON drinks.) Now you are better, are you not? Come, let me help you to your room. You must lie down.

GARRISON. Spare!—spare!

(Exit with MRS. GARRISON, his hand raised in invocation over her head. An instant later a great groan is heard outside, the fall of a body, and then a woman's scream.)

MARY (*after a solemn pause*). You know what that means? Retribution has come. The debt is paid.

DONNA. Your name? Your place in society? You will still, of course, claim them?

MARY. My name, my place in society? No. I will never claim them. I will leave them both with her.

DONNA. And she is to know nothing of the truth?

MARY. Let the truth be buried with the unhappy man who is dying there, or is already dead. Let her remain—Mrs. Henry James Garrison—New York's charity queen.

DONNA. You wrong yourself.

MARY. Because I must not wrong *her*. Nothing of my misery is *her* doing. She is good. She has her noble work among the poor. She has her little son. And then (*slowly*) she is the sister of the man who suffered at my hands. Come, my kind, good friend, let us leave this house—New York—the States. Take me back with you to your own land.

(Her arms outstretched to the Senora, who gives assent by a loving embrace.)

CURTAIN.

END OF PROLOGUE.

Ten Years elapse between Prologue and Play

ACT I.

TEMPTATION.

SCENE: AFTERNOON AT THE CHARITY BAZAAR, MADISON GARDENS. THERE IS A SEAT ON ONE SIDE, A RUSTIC SUMMER HOUSE ON THE OTHER.

Fashionable promenaders are disclosed. A group in front includes COUNT GASTON DE FAYE, DR. BRIDGES, JOHN SINGLETON, and MRS. LENNOX. On the seat is MRS. SINGLETON, not participating in the conversation, but eagerly following it.

COUNT. You may laugh if you like, but call her hypnotist, thought reader, medium, clairvoyante, or any other name, the fact remains that La Stella is gifted with the most wonderful powers of any woman in the world.

MRS. LENNOX. But are not the stories of her marvelous feats absurdly exaggerated? In the newspapers you read things about her which, to a person of ordinary intelligence, stamp the woman as an impostor.

COUNT. La Stella is not responsible for what people choose to write or say about her. No one who has spent ten minutes in her company would ever call her an impostor. She is well named La Stella—a bright, shining intellectual star.

SINGLETON (*to BRIDGES*). What is your opinion, doctor? You have been to this woman's receptions, and have seen some of the thought-reading wonders she performs.

COUNT. Yes, let us hear Dr. Bridges' verdict. He is a man trained to observation and to the scientific weighing of evidence.

BRIDGES. The Count is quite right, Mrs. Lennox. La Stella is certainly no impostor. She is a woman of great ability—one of the most remarkable I have ever met.

SINGLETON. A professed believer in spiritualism—"spooks" and all that sort of thing.

BRIDGES. Nothing of the kind, Singleton. She has simply set herself to study the complex problem of the relationship subsisting between matter and mind. She carries on her investigations in a thoroughly scientific spirit and in a scientific way.

SINGLETON. And where has she gained the wonderful knowledge she claims to possess?

COUNT. She has traveled over half the world, lived for six or seven years in the East, among Buddhist mahatmas, Indian fakirs, Persian dervishes, and all that sort of people.

BRIDGES. La Stella has certainly had remarkable adventures and unique opportunities. You should hear some of her reminiscences, Singleton.

MRS. LENNOX. And now she has descended upon New York to display her tricks of Oriental jugglery—to make money in the long run, you may be sure.

BRIDGES. Not at all. La Stella's wealth and refinement place her above all such suspicions.

COUNT. And her extraordinary mental powers are acknowledged among theosophists throughout the world.

BRIDGES. I honestly believe that her sole object in coming here is to systematize the discoveries she has made in the East by carrying out similar experiments among our practical, alert, and down-to-date American folks.

COUNT. And she has begun her studies by mystifying every scientific man in our midst, yourself included, doctor.

BRIDGES. Oh, I won't say she has mystified us. But some of her experiences go beyond anything we have hitherto deemed possible, and certainly call for careful scientific investigation.

MRS. LENNOX. To prove the woman's good faith?

BRIDGES. No. She has, I think, satisfied us all of that. What we want to find out now is the scientific explanation of phenomena that at first sight seem occult and mysterious.

SINGLETON. Then the stories current about the woman are not mere idle gossip?

BRIDGES. Well, I can't vouch for all the stories that are current about the famous La Stella. Gossip and enterprising newspaper reporters have been pretty free with her name. Inevitable, of course, when one has made such a sudden and extraordinary sensation, taking both society and the scientific world by storm. But all exaggeration eliminated, the simple truth remains sufficiently wonderful and difficult to explain.

(MRS. SINGLETON *joins the group*.)

MRS. LENNOX. Then what is the simple truth?

MRS. SINGLETON. Can this lady tell, for example, what different people may be doing at night away from their homes?

MRS. LENNOX (*to the COUNT*). Not so very difficult that. In New York people away from their homes at night are generally doing—what they shouldn't.

COUNT. And the others are dying to know their misdeeds, because they cannot share in them.

BRIDGES. Well, Mrs. Singleton, if individuals have submitted themselves to the suggestive power of La Stella, and been put under her hypnotic influence, she will certainly be able to tell what they are doing at some particular time however far away they may be.

MRS. SINGLETON. Suggestive power? Hypnotic influence? What does it all mean?

(SINGLETON and BRIDGES *move a few paces apart, conversing*. MRS. SINGLETON *abstractedly draws lines on the turf with her parasol*.)

COUNT. The language of scientific men is hard to understand, but Mrs. LENNOX knows all about it.

MRS. LENNOX. Yes, sir. Dr. Bridges means that this wonderful clairvoyante can find out the wicked secrets of faithless men.

COUNT. And the little peccadilloes of wives as well.

MRS. LENNOX. For shame even to suggest that we are capable of peccadilloes.

COUNT. In some cases no doubt it would be a mistake to use the diminutive term.

MRS. SINGLETON (*to herself*). I'll do it. Tonight I will go to this mind reader. My suspicions must be set at rest.

MRS. LENNOX. Come, Ethel, the gentlemen had better finish their conversation alone. Dr. Bridges is incomprehensible, and Count de Faye unendurable.

MRS. SINGLETON (*rousing herself*). All right. We'll take a stroll. (*To the COUNT*). Remain here. I shall return. I wish to speak with you again—and alone.

COUNT (*bowing*). As madame knows, I am always at her service.

MRS. LENNOX (*to MRS. SINGLETON, as they move away*). For my part, I still believe that half the stories about this woman are ridiculous exaggerations.

(*Exeunt MRS. LENNOX and MRS. SINGLETON*.)

COUNT (*to himself*). Good. The spell is working. Her jealousy is thoroughly aroused. She will follow out my suggestions, and go to La Stella's tonight.

(*All the other promenaders have sauntered off gradually. SINGLETON and BRIDGES approach the COUNT*.)

SINGLETON. But, my dear doctor, there is a very dark side to this woman's powers. That is, if report speaks true.

BRIDGES. And what does report say?

SINGLETON. That she has ruined many homes by poisoning the minds of husbands against wives, and of wives against husbands.

BRIDGES. Pshaw! No doubt La Stella has seen much, and on occasion her revelations may have shown a good deal that had better have remained undisclosed.

SINGLETON. Yes, but she is also said to have lured foolish, jealous women to act on that frightfully dangerous theory that wrong-doing on one side is best paid out by wrong-doing on the other.

BRIDGES. That I'll never believe, Singleton. La Stella is incapable of such infamous conduct.

SINGLETON. But rumor in this case speaks precisely.

BRIDGES. And falsely. I happen to know that this lady devotes both time and money to acts of charity that would do honor to any of her sex.

SINGLETON. But even the most depraved are often disposed to charity. In my work in the slums I've found that out.

BRIDGES. Yes; but that La Stella, whose own life, I am convinced, is without reproach, ever set herself to debauch the minds of others—that I shall never believe—at least on the evidence of mere rumor and tittle-tattle.

SINGLETON. Why, it has been represented to me by Count de Faye here—

BRIDGES. Count de Faye—her particular friend?

COUNT. Pardon me, my dear sir, but in such a matter it is as well that names should not be mentioned. I was but repeating general hearsay, which Dr. Bridges so properly condemns.

SINGLETON. Well, I've been told that this clairvoyante's reception room is nothing more nor less than a place of assignation.

BRIDGES. A cruel and malicious slander—an abominable falsehood.

SINGLETON. It has even been suggested to me to help in putting a stop to the woman's infamous career.

BRIDGES. To suppress La Stella would be a calamity to scientific research.

SINGLETON. But scientific research must not be made a cloak for immorality.

BRIDGES. Nor falsehood a pretext for injustice. However, I can't argue longer. I've got an appointment. Good-bye.

SINGLETON. So long, doctor. Some other time I'd like to resume our argument about the real value of this new science of hypnotism.

BRIDGES. With pleasure. Count Gaston de Faye, adieu. I had thought that you at least would have stood by the fair fame of La Stella.

COUNT. I am one of her most devoted admirers.

BRIDGES (*indignantly*). An admirer who gives currency to slander is not himself to be admired.

(*Exit.*)

COUNT (*to himself*). The learned little rooster pecks vigorously.

SINGLETON. Well, Count, I hardly know what to think. I have told you how my sister, Mrs. Garrison, left me her fortune in trust, that I should use it, as she had done, in works of charity.

COUNT. A noble bequest, nobly administered, as all the world knows.

SINGLETON. The stewardship of this fund has brought me into contact with much sin and sorrow. It has made me something of an ardent social reformer. If this woman La Stella's house is the plague spot you represent it to be, I feel impelled to help in clearing it away.

COUNT. But Dr. Bridges is right, Mr. Singleton. We must have proof of those grave accusations—proof—absolute proof.

SINGLETON. And how is absolute proof to be obtained? Will no one help me to the facts by telling exactly what they do know?

COUNT (*sardonically*). That is hardly likely. No one is anxious to join in such a thankless crusade. If people told all they knew about La Stella, who could say what reputations might not be compromised—what fair sinners might not be driven from the fold of respectability?

SINGLETON. So I can expect no assistance in my task—not even from you?

COUNT. My dear sir, I am the very last man to apply to in such a delicate matter.

SINGLETON. Then what am I to do?

COUNT. You must rely upon yourself.

SINGLETON. That's not saying much.

COUNT. Oh, yes. You can go to La Stella, and force a confession from her own lips.

SINGLETON. But will she make it?

COUNT. I think it probable—almost certain. I know her well. She is a woman of wonderful mental gifts. But in presence of a stronger will than her own, she is powerless. To a man like you, with your great reputation in the philanthropic world, she will bend like a sapling in the breeze.

SINGLETON. Are you sure?

COUNT. Confident.

SINGLETON. But how am I to see her alone, or at least under conditions that will permit of such a confession being made?

COUNT. Leave that to me. Be at La Stella's hotel tonight at nine o'clock precisely. I'll undertake that you'll be admitted to her presence, and will find her alone.

SINGLETON. But this is Tuesday. On Tuesday nights I always go down to our social club in the Bowery. You can't make another date?—say to-morrow?

COUNT. Except for tonight I can make no certain appointment for you. Take my advice, Singleton. Go tonight. Break with routine for once—in such an excellent cause.

SINGLETON. I could, of course, leave the club for an hour. Well, I feel half inclined to do as you suggest.

COUNT. Then I'll arrange accordingly. Nine o'clock, remember.

SINGLETON. Right you are. I'll be there.

(*Re-enter Mrs. SINGLETON.*)

Hullo, Ethel, my dear. I was just going to look for you. I must be off. Mrs. Lennox tells me she will take you home in her auto.

MRS. SINGLETON (*coldly*). Everybody will be here for another hour yet.

SINGLETON. Yes, but I've business that must be attended to. Make yourself happy, and enjoy the afternoon. Count de Faye will help you to find your friends again.

COUNT. Delighted.

MRS. SINGLETON. And you, John?

COUNT. I'll go straight from my office to the Bowery.

MRS. SINGLETON. Won't you dine at home tonight?

SINGLETON. Impossible, dear. Tuesday, you know, I'm always expected in the Bowery.

MRS. SINGLETON. And at what hour will you be home?

SINGLETON. Oh, as usual, about twelve o'clock. Now, Ethel, ta-ta for the present. (*Kisses her lightly.*) Count, *au revoir*.

(*Exit.*)

MRS. SINGLETON (*to herself*). Home at twelve o'clock!—as usual every Tuesday night!—down in the Bowery!—a social club! Absurd. I am being deceived—being made a fool of.

COUNT. You wanted to speak to me alone.

MRS. SINGLETON. Oh, I cannot talk just now.

COUNT. But you are distressed, you are vexed about something.

MRS. SINGLETON. No, no, it was only a momentary annoyance.

COUNT. Forgive me, but I heard all that passed. Ah, my dear Mrs. Singleton, I understand your position. Why do you not give me your complete confidence? I could perhaps advise.

MRS. SINGLETON (*scornfully*). Advise? What advice do I require, pray?

COUNT. Listen. You are not in your husband's life. He has occupations, pursuits, pleasures, in which you do not share.

MRS. SINGLETON. Count de Faye, how dare you say such things?

COUNT. Ah, you think you know everything that your husband does. Well, well; there is no one so blind as the woman whose eyes have become sealed by infatuated confidence. She maintains a serene countenance while all her friends are laughing—behind their fans.

MRS. SINGLETON. Oh, you insinuate horrible things. You are cruel.

COUNT. Cruel! I am only cruel that I may be kind. My heart has nothing but pity for you in your misfortune.

MRS. SINGLETON. My misfortune! What do you mean?

COUNT. Mrs. Singleton, have I been your intimate friend for all these months without being able to enter into your feelings? I have met you almost every day since we first became acquainted, and I can read your heart like an open book.

MRS. SINGLETON. I have nothing to conceal.

COUNT. No; but I see you struggling to hide your unhappiness.

MRS. SINGLETON (*drawing herself up*). Count!

COUNT. Your pride is forcing you to try and remain stoical. But you suffer all the same. Ah, if you would only accept the sympathy of one who is devoted to you.

MRS. SINGLETON. You must not say such things, Count de Faye.

COUNT. I can not help myself. (*Tenderly*.) I wish to help you in your trouble.

MRS. SINGLETON. You have always been kind and thoughtful.

COUNT. And that is why I told you this morning about the wonderful La Stella.

MRS. SINGLETON. Ah, yes, La Stella. It was to speak about her that I returned here. Has she really these extraordinary powers of telling what people want to know?

COUNT. You heard what Dr. Bridges said. Why not take advantage of your husband's absence to go to La Stella's tonight? I venture to predict that you will there learn enough to set your doubts at rest.

MRS. SINGLETON. Or to render me miserable for the rest of my days.

COUNT. No; misery is caused only by uncertainty. With sure knowledge, a woman knows how to play her part.

MRS. SINGLETON. Then, how can I secure this interview with La Stella? After all you've told me, I can not run the risk of anyone knowing that I have visited a woman with such a reputation.

COUNT. There need be no risk. I can arrange everything. You join Mrs. Lennox' party at the opera tonight?

MRS. SINGLETON. Yes.

COUNT. Well, I'll meet you at the entrance to the Metropolitan, and escort you to La Stella's. Her hotel is close by.

MRS. SINGLETON. But I am afraid. It seems so very indiscreet. What if I am recognized entering her apartments? What if I find other people there?

COUNT. You are only conjuring up fanciful dangers. Come in a cloak and hood, and no one will by any possibility recognize you. No one will see you. The secret will remain between you and me.

MRS. SINGLETON. And this woman La Stella? Won't she learn my name?

COUNT. There will be no need for La Stella even to hear your name. You will see there what you will see. I cannot speak more plainly.

MRS. SINGLETON. You say I'll have proofs of my husband's faithlessness?

COUNT. You can judge of that for yourself. You'll know, for example, whether or not he is at the—social club in the Bowery tonight.

MRS. SINGLETON. Ah, yes, yes. There; I *will* go. I will risk everything. I can not endure this uncertainty.

COUNT. One condition, remember, Mrs. Singleton. Whatever happens at La Stella's, you will make no scene, you will come away at once, in silence. I have your promise as to that.

MRS. SINGLETON. I promise. I only want to know whether his life is the living lie your hints suggest.

COUNT (*insinuatingly*). And you'll be advised by me? There must be no scandal? You can just rest content in the knowledge you have gained. You will owe no more duty to your husband. You will listen then to my pleadings?

MRS. SINGLETON. Stop! I've forbidden you to speak like that.

COUNT. But after you have proofs of your husband's deceit?

MRS. SINGLETON. Ah, after that! Who knows? (*With a shiver.*) Perhaps the deluge.

COUNT. Hush then; be careful. Here come some friends. Try and regain your composure. You will keep our appointment?

MRS. SINGLETON. I shall keep it.

(*Enter promenaders, including MRS. LENNOX and LA STELLA, the latter costumed as a widow.*)

MRS. LENNOX. Ah, Count de Faye. Still conspiring? You live in an atmosphere of mystery.

COUNT. And you, madame, in an atmosphere of charming vivacity—(*aside*) and impertinent interference.

MRS. LENNOX. Ethel, I've been looking for you everywhere. Why do you hide yourself like this? Come round to the bandstand. Everything's very gay now.

MRS. SINGLETON. Gay? To me the whole affair is insufferably dull and stupid. Shan't we be going home soon?

MRS. LENNOX. You are worrying over some secret trouble, little woman, and you will not confide in me, your best friend. What has the Count been saying to you?

MRS. SINGLETON. Count de Faye? What could he have to say to me? No; I have a headache. Is there any chance of getting a cup of tea?

MRS. LENNOX. I should imagine so. Let us investigate.

(*Exit MRS. SINGLETON and MRS. LENNOX. The other promenaders have also strolled away. LA STELLA approaches the COUNT.*)

STELLA. Count de Faye.

COUNT (*bowing, and not recognizing her*). Madame, your most humble servant.

STELLA (*raising veil*). My disguise is good, when even you don't recognize me.

COUNT. You here, Stella?

STELLA. Yes; as you see, I am here.

COUNT. And disguised?

STELLA. Certainly; I wish to see, but not to be seen. I have come to this society affair for a special reason.

COUNT. Which is?

STELLA. A whim of my own. I wish you to present me to Mrs. Singleton.

COUNT. Oh, that would be the height of imprudence. It would jeopardize all the plans I have so carefully laid.

STELLA. Imprudence perhaps; but it is my will.

COUNT. Listen, my friend. I have accomplished everything for you. This very night Singleton is coming to your hotel.

STELLA. Tonight? Do you say that? This very night?

COUNT. It is so. I have managed it with great difficulty. He comes to you at nine o'clock. Don't spoil all my arrangements by persisting in this foolish fancy of the moment.

STELLA (*to herself*). So tonight I shall see John Singleton again—at last, after all these years. Oh, I wonder if I am acting wisely in re-opening my heart's wounds. (*To the COUNT*). Look you, Count de Faye, it is really you who have persuaded me to this interview with Mr. Singleton.

COUNT. Well, my dear Stella, don't I know your story? You will re-

member how in Paris at the beginning of our friendship, you confessed that despite long years of seeking after distraction you still loved—the John Singleton of your early days.

STELLA. I made that admission in a moment of weakness.

COUNT. And I was able to help you with advice. I induced you to come to New York.

STELLA. Yes, the New York I had avoided all these years. I had suffered in London till you whispered that there was still hope for me with the man I loved.

COUNT. As I have said, there *is* hope.

STELLA. You tell me there is no love between him and his wife.

COUNT. How could a man like that love such a little brainless doll? Pretty, I grant you. But they haven't a thought in common, nor an interest in life in which both share.

STELLA. All the same I've been told they are very devoted to each other.

COUNT. Like many married people, they contrive to save appearances before the world. I, who have had occasion to peep behind the scenes, know the truth.

STELLA. Then his marriage has been a mistake?

COUNT. A miserable failure.

STELLA. And you say he thinks of me?

COUNT. I tell you that he still loves you. He has spoken to me about his great sorrow—his lost love—the loss that nearly broke his heart a dozen years ago and still leaves him a disappointed and desolate man.

STELLA (*sadly*). Then his life, too, is a joyless one!

COUNT. You have only to meet each other again, to come to an understanding.

STELLA (*to herself*). He may yet be mine. Tonight I shall know all. (*To the COUNT*). You say he comes to me tonight?

COUNT. Yes; but remember, I have followed your instructions in still concealing your identity. I have had to make things appear different to what they are. You understand that?

STELLA. Yes, yes, I understand.

COUNT. So tonight he comes to interview the famous mind reader, La Stella, whom he believes to be an impostor and a worker of all manner of mischief.

STELLA (*speaking more to herself than to the COUNT*). Oh, I do not mind that. I do not care how or why he comes. Only let him come. I long to prove to him that the sweetheart of his youth was never the dishonored woman he believes her to be. And I may even yet be able to bring him consolation for his disappointment in life. Surely a means will be found. Oh, let me only learn the truth from his own lips that he still loves me—that he loves me just a little still.

COUNT (*with a cynical smile*). He has only to hear your story of self-sacrifice, to listen to your voice again, to look into your eyes, and he will be at your feet as in the old days. But now that everything is arranged for your meeting, you will let me take you quietly away from this place.

STELLA. No; wait a minute. I saw Mr. Singleton drive off in his automobile.

COUNT. Yes, he has left.

STELLA. So his wife is here alone?

COUNT. Well, what of that?

STELLA. She will not know me. Yes, Count; I want to speak to her. You must introduce me, under an assumed name.

COUNT. This is ridiculous.

STELLA. No, no. When I have talked with his wife, I shall know better how to act with him. I take your word that they do not love each other. But I wish to see things for myself.

COUNT. Oh, I can't consent to this.

STELLA (*proudly*). Count Gaston de Faye, you shall do my bidding. I know to my cost that for the present you hold me in your power through your knowledge of the one secret of my life—my old name and my old love. But do not forget, my friend, that I am in possession of a few facts about yourself, the disclosure of which might prove rather unpleasant.

COUNT (*angrily*). Ah, you know too much.

STELLA. And can therefore be dangerous, if I choose. So you will obey me in this. I want to meet Mrs. Singleton. That is she over there, is it not, just leaving the tea pavilion?

COUNT. Yes, that is Mrs. Singleton.

STELLA. Well, see, they are coming this way. Introduce me.

COUNT. How can I do that without your being recognized?

STELLA. Contrive some excuse to bring us together. For the occasion I shall personate some mutual friend—let us say Madame Guichard of Paris.

COUNT. Am I to present you in that name?

STELLA. Yes, and leave the rest to me.

COUNT. Then, it would be as well for you to drop your veil.

STELLA (*dropping veil*). There; no one will know me now.

(*Re-enter Mrs. LENNOX and Mrs. SINGLETON. LA STELLA and the COUNT draw aside, and are concealed for the moment by the rustic summer house.*)

COUNT (*to himself*). Confound it. It is madness. Everything may be spoiled.

MRS. LENNOX. Really, Ethel, you are in a queer mood this afternoon. What has upset you?

MRS. SINGLETON. Oh, I can not tell you. I feel all on the nerves. Everything grates upon my temper. I detest this crowd, with all its frivolous chatter and empty laughter.

MRS. LENNOX. You are thinking of other things.

MRS. SINGLETON (*seating herself petulantly on the seat*). Yes, Mildred; perhaps I am thinking of other things.

MRS. LENNOX. Then, I'll go and telephone for the auto, and we'll go home. I'll find you here again in ten minutes, dear?

MRS. SINGLETON. I'm glad to rest quiet awhile.

MRS. LENNOX (*at exit*). I'm sure there's something wrong, and somehow I distrust that Count Gaston de Faye. But monsieur will have to reckon with me if he is up to any mischief.

(*Exit.*)

COUNT. Mrs. Singleton, may I introduce a friend?

MRS. SINGLETON. No, no, I wish to be alone. I am tired.

(*LA STELLA advances.*)

COUNT. But this lady desires most particularly to be presented to you—Madame Guichard from Paris.

MRS. SINGLETON (*rising, politely, but with evident bad grace*). A countrywoman of yours, Count de Faye? I am pleased to meet you, madame.

STELLA. And I am honored in making your acquaintance. Your husband is a social reformer, I'm told. So was the man most dear to me.

MRS. SINGLETON (*sympathetically, noticing her widow's costume*). Ah, I observe. How did you suffer your sad bereavement?

STELLA. Monsieur Guichard died of typhoid fever contracted in the slums of Paris.

MRS. SINGLETON. How terrible. Such a grief as that would be my death blow.

STELLA. Then you love your husband dearly?

MRS. SINGLETON (*lightly*). Love my husband? Well, that is a question.

COUNT. I don't think, however, that Mrs. Singleton loves her husband's occupations.

MRS. SINGLETON. No, that is true. Frankly, I consider that actual daily contact with the degraded classes is positively hateful.

STELLA. The work must be done that way, and the man who does it surely follows a noble calling.

MRS. SINGLETON. To me the whole thing is repugnant. Charity is all right, but the rich can afford to pay people to administer it.

STELLA. Some wives would be deeply interested in such work carried on by their husbands.

MRS. SINGLETON (*laughing sarcastically*). Well, here I am at a Charity Bazaar, am I not?

STELLA. A mere pretence!—a society function!

MRS. SINGLETON. More to one's taste than slumming and dying of typhoid fever, isn't it?

STELLA (*shrinking away*). That is a terrible thing to say.

MRS. SINGLETON. Oh, pardon me if I have caused you pain. I forgot for the moment to whom I was speaking—about your poor husband; I was thinking only of my own case.

STELLA (*coldly*). Your views certainly interest me.

COUNT. Mrs. Singleton would rather see a poor play than listen to the best sermon.

MRS. SINGLETON. Sure. And tonight for choice—a comedy. Ah, a good hour of laughter at the theatre lifts one out of oneself, does it not?

STELLA. I have more serious matters in my mind.

MRS. SINGLETON. Now, that is just what John would say—Mr. Singleton, I mean. He is always looking on the sombre side of things. I hold that we are in this world to enjoy ourselves—that we make others around us happier by being happy ourselves.

COUNT. Certainly the most agreeable philosophy of life.

STELLA (*turning aside*). A butterfly—a frivolous butterfly!

MRS. SINGLETON. This evening, Count de Faye, I am all excitement. I just feel as if I would like to be breaking the record on an automobile, or going up in a balloon.

COUNT. There is Mrs. Lennox signalling to you.

MRS. SINGLETON. Ah yes. Then I must be off. You will excuse me, Madame Guichard. I am at home on Thursdays. Goodbye. (*Aside to the COUNT.*) At a quarter to nine, Count.

(*Exit.*)

COUNT (*with a sardonic smile*). Have you seen enough?

STELLA. Enough! Poor, unfortunate John Singleton!

COUNT. He will still have *you* to live for.

STELLA. Yes, yes. Such a frivolous creature as that has no right to rob me of his love. Love justifies all things. Rightfully John Singleton is still mine—and he will yet be mine.

CURTAIN.

END OF ACT I.

ACT II

HALLUCINATION.

SCENE: EVENING IN THE BOUDOIR OF LA STELLA'S SUITE OF ROOMS. AT THE BACK OF STAGE IS A CURTAINED DOOR. AMONG THE FURNITURE IS AN ESCRITOIRE.

BABETTE is disclosed, arranging odds and ends. She speaks with a crisp French accent.

BABETTE. Yes, I am pretty sure that something is going to happen tonight. Home comes my mistress this evening, in a fine state of excitement. Off goes the dinner untasted. Into this room she flounces, and walks up and down for an hour, for all the world like a beautiful panther in a cage. And her things are all over the place. Here are her gloves turned inside out. (*Picks up gloves from floor, and straightens them.*) And here's the widow's bonnet she was wearing, thrown into a corner, and crumpled up as if it had been run over by a taxicab. (*Picks up bonnet from floor.*) And here is her bottle of smelling salts on the hearth-rug, I declare. (*Picks up bottle.*) I'll put that handy; she will be needing it again this evening, I guess, as the Americans say. (*Puts bottle on table, and then pauses in a reflective mood.*) Now, I wonder what is going to happen. No visitors are to be admitted tonight—except just one. And here is his name written down on a card, so that there will be no mistake. (*Takes card from pocket, and reads.*) John Singleton! Mon Dieu, is it a love affair at last? Is madame going to have a lover after all?

(*Enter COUNT GASTON DE FAYE.*)

COUNT. Ah, Babette, are you alone?

BABETTE. You here, monsieur?

COUNT. You see I am.

BABETTE. How did you get in?

COUNT. Oh, the boy knows, of course, that I am not included in the general veto. A dollar brought that to his comprehension.

BABETTE. You are always bribing people to do what is wrong.

COUNT. Well, my dear, everyone seems very willing to be bribed.

BABETTE. You want to see madame?

COUNT. Yes.

BABETTE. She is resting.

COUNT. Just as I anticipated. And meanwhile, Babette, I want a few words with you.

BABETTE. No, no, monsieur, don't come tempting me any more, please.

COUNT. There is just one little service, Babette—the last I shall require of you, my little countrywoman.

BABETTE. It is always a case of being the last.

COUNT. Ah, but this is the very last—and a very slight service indeed. A twenty dollar bill was never more easily earned.

BABETTE (*twirling her apron dubiously*). I don't want your money. I am beginning to hate myself for the things you have made me do.

COUNT. Oh, in work of this kind, that's the feeling that always comes over the young beginner. It is like seasickness on a first voyage—invariably, but soon over. Then you laugh at the qualms that seemed so unendurable a little time ago.

BABETTE. I have been false to my mistress—my good, kind mistress. She would despise me, she would turn me out of doors, if she knew the mean things I had done.

COUNT. Exactly, my dear; which makes it all the more necessary

to keep matters quiet by doing my bidding now. As I said a moment ago, this is the last service I'll require. Tomorrow, if the qualms still continue, you may make a fresh start, and—forget the whole thing.

BABETTE (*sullenly*). What do you want of me now?

COUNT. Just this. A gentleman named Mr. John Singleton comes here tonight at nine o'clock.

BABETTE. You always know everything.

COUNT. That is my business, dear girl. Well, just a few minutes before, I shall myself arrive.

BABETTE. But madame is to receive no one but this Mr. Singleton.

COUNT. I understand all that. But you will admit me privately, to the little parlor off the hall.

BABETTE (*in surprise*). Ma foi!

COUNT. No one else in the house must know that I am here. And there will be a lady with me as well.

BABETTE. A lady?

COUNT. Madame Peralta will receive her visitor in this room, and I require you to see that the door here—(*pointing to the curtained door*)—is left open. Let the curtains be drawn, but the door must be left open. You understand?

BABETTE. That you may play the—what you call?—the eavesdropper?

COUNT. Well, the open door is not precisely required for ventilation. See here are forty dollars. (*Hands her the bills.*) I double my fee, as this is the last time.

BABETTE. I hate this money.

COUNT. It rustles pleasantly all the same. You will be able to get yourself that Merry Widow hat now.

BABETTE. Bother the hat.

COUNT (*persuasively*). But you will oblige me, Babette.

(*Touches her under the chin.*)

BABETTE (*smiling*). Oh, you can persuade a woman to do anything, monsieur.

COUNT. One of the secrets of success in life, my dear. Now, Babette, go to your mistress.

BABETTE. To say you are here?

COUNT. Yes; ask her to be so good as to see me, just for five minutes.

BABETTE. She won't be pleased.

COUNT. Don't worry about that.

(*Exit BABETTE.*)

I must close accounts with La Stella before this interview. Any one of several contingencies is on the cards tonight. *She* may leave New York, *I* may leave New York; or matters may arrange themselves exactly as I wish, and there will be no bother and fuss at all. In that last event my triumph indeed will be complete; I'll still be able to hold on here, and Ethel will be mine. (*Taking up and sniffing at smelling salts bottle.*) Pshaw! I know it is folly to complicate business with love. But, there, the fact remains. I made friends with her, set myself out to be agreeable, pretended to be her devoted admirer, with one object in view, to gain the secrets her husband holds—secrets about men and women here in New York that can make me enough money for the rest of my days. And it has ended by my loving her—in real earnest. The stakes are high; but even if I fail to rake in the cash, I may at least have Ethel for a consolation prize. Yes, by heavens, if there is no other way, I would sacrifice everything else, and take her away from New York tonight.

(*Enter LA STELLA.*)

STELLA (*coldly*). Why do you come here, Count de Faye? You know I wished to be alone.

COUNT. I have come to say goodbye, Stella. After tonight, of course, there is every chance that we may not meet again.

STELLA. What has happened?

COUNT. Oh, nothing special has happened. But events are reaching a climax, and we don't know what may follow next. Perhaps you may be taking your departure from New York tonight, who knows—and not alone?

STELLA. Ah!

COUNT. But in any case there is the likelihood that I shall be absent from the city for a time. So it is *au revoir*, my dear Stella. I have finished the work for you which I took in hand.

STELLA (*with slight contempt*). Oh, now I begin to comprehend. Your task is done; your contract is completed.

COUNT. It is completed. I have guarded your secret with scrupulous care, and without disclosing it have arranged that John Singleton comes to your rooms tonight. In bringing this about, I may have said one of two things in regard to yourself which may seem unkind as they are untrue. But if any tittle-tattle of this sort reaches your ears you will readily understand that such statements were made only with a view to effect the object you had at heart.

STELLA. Yes, yes, I shall understand. What does it matter? A few light words spoken about the clairvoyante, La Stella, are of little consequence when the character of Mary Carew still remains unredeemed.

COUNT. Well, tonight everything will be put right, and Mary Carew will have justice done to her at last. You have the opportunity for which you have longed, the opportunity I promised to secure. The rest lies with yourself. My work is done.

STELLA (*rising*). Except in one matter. I am your debtor.

(*She goes to the escritoir.*)

COUNT. Oh, the few thousand dollars as arranged. I am sorry, my dear Stella, that such a matter should be mentioned between us. But you know that my family fortunes are impaired, that—

STELLA (*with cold dignity, handing him a packet of notes*). Make no apologies, pray. Here is the money. I had it ready for you.

COUNT (*attempting to kiss her hand, but she treating him with disdain*). Thank you. Perhaps at some future time I may again be of service.

STELLA. Leave me now, please.

COUNT. Then *au revoir*.

STELLA. We shall not meet again. Adieu.

(*Exit COUNT. STELLA slowly paces the room.*)

Yes, tonight everything relating to the present ends—how exactly, God alone knows. But it ends, it ends. I first sought peace of mind in travel, but wherever I moved the shadow of my sorrow followed me. I have tried to gain distraction in the excitement of the life I have recently led. But there remains always in my heart the same dull, aching void. I long for rest.

Rest with him? Yes; if he still loves me, if it will bring him happiness, too. Why should the mere conventions of the world keep us apart—bind him to a woman who does not love him, whom he cannot love? I have suffered—oh, how I have suffered—during ten long years. And for his sake, as I imagined.

All this time I have kept away from New York. But when I do return it is to find him miserable—his life as empty and unendurable as my own. Why should the useless self-sacrifice endure for another day? Why? Why? And yet I tremble at the thought of what is coming next.

(*The clock chimes nine. STELLA shivers.*)

I am not myself tonight. I feel the old fever back again—the fever from which I nearly died in Chile. (*Shudders.*) It grows so cold.

(*Enter BABETTE.*)

BABETTE. Mr. John Singleton!

(*Enter SINGLETON.*)

BABETTE (*at door*). La! la! It cannot be a love affair after all. They would have rushed into each other's arms.

(*Exit, drawing curtains at door.*)

SINGLETON. Madame Stella, I believe—or Madame Peralta, should I say?

(LA STELLA bows, but remains silent and with face averted.)

So you have been prepared for my coming? Perhaps you even know the object for which I seek an interview with the far famed clairvoyante and hypnotist, La Stella?

(LA STELLA sobs audibly.)

Ah! La Stella is overcome. So it needs no words from me to awaken in her a sense of her responsibilities. That is well. My task is half accomplished.

(Lays his hat on table.)

Please be seated, madame. I wish to tell you a story; I wish to make an appeal to the better feelings which I recognize you possess.

(LA STELLA sinks on sofa, burying her face in her arm. SINGLETON sits at some distance.)

I had a sister once. Perhaps you may have heard her name, for it is associated to this day with many acts of charity in New York—Mrs. Henry James Garrison. About her husband I need not speak, except to say that he died three years after his marriage, and by the event my sister came into a large inheritance. Before then she had worked a great deal for the poor and unfortunate in this city. But in her widowhood she became still more devoted and assiduous in every kindly deed. Six months later, however, her only child, a little boy, was also taken.

(STELLA gives a smothered cry.)

That broke her heart. She, too, died. Poor, dear Grace!

(He rises and paces the room thoughtfully.)

But on her death bed she gave me a solemn charge. She told me, for the first time, a circumstance connected with her husband's death. On the day that Mr. Garrison died, a girl in great distress came mysteriously to his house. But she as mysteriously disappeared, and my sister could never get track of her again. She never heard her story; but she could guess it was a story of shame and sorrow, and of heartless cruelty on the part of some one—no matter whom. And that girl's face haunted my sister, the story which she reconstructed in her own mind was ever with her. It was the face and the story, real or imaginary, that prompted her to fresh acts of benevolence. She hoped, if God had spared her, to have devoted her life to succoring her sisters in misfortune. But, as I have said—she died.

(STELLA sobs quietly.)

She left me her fortune, unreservedly, but with the injunction that its income should be applied to the good work which lay next her heart. That trust I have ever since sought honorably to discharge. You have heard and understood this sad story?

STELLA. I hear, I understand.

SINGLETON (in somewhat lighter tone). Well, the spending of this money has naturally brought me into close contact with misfortune and suffering of every kind. And I have come to realize that the only effective remedy for the misery we see around us lies, not in giving relief in individual cases—although that is necessary, and humane, and wise—but in elevating the general standard of our social system, in making the example of good living spread its beneficent influences all around. Prevention is always better than cure. To save people from falling is better far than merely to assist those that are down.

(STELLA has raised her face, but still keeps it averted.)

And that is why, Madame Stella, I take the liberty of coming to you tonight to make an appeal to your better nature—to plead with you to help me in the good cause of making the world better than it is. Will you give that help?

STELLA (rising and facing him). In what way can I help you, John Singleton?

SINGLETON. God in heaven, Mary—it is you—you?

STELLA. Yes, John, it is I—it is Mary Carew.

SINGLETON (*shrinking from her*). Why do you cross my path again? After all these years, and under this name—La Stella—this notorious name! My God, I was not prepared for this.

STELLA. John, do not spurn me, do not shrink from me. Hear me, I beseech you; hear at least a part of my story.

SINGLETON. Your story of infamy.

STELLA. You shudder at the name of La Stella, the hypnotist whom many no doubt, in their ignorance of a new science, call an impostor.

SINGLETON. Or worse.

STELLA. Oh, the idle gossip that may be told about La Stella, you need not heed that. You cannot believe such things of the woman you once loved?

SINGLETON. The woman I once loved! And what is her memory to me but a memory of shame? That story was bad enough, but this one is infinitely worse. Oh God, that you should have come to this. (*With a sweep of his arm.*) The sight of you here, amidst these trappings of ill-gotten luxury—your identity with that La Stella, the adventuress whose very name fills the breast of every honest man with loathing—Oh! it is terrible, terrible, that you should have descended to—*this*.

STELLA. John, you will not pre-judge me, you will not be harsh and cruel. You have still a little love for the sweetheart of old times?

SINGLETON. Love for *you*, for the sweetheart of old times! Do not speak such words. The old times are dead—for me Mary Carew is dead. I address myself to you as Madame Stella.

STELLA (*proudly*). And you come to pronounce judgment on the woman you once loved, but whom you now call an adventuress, an object of loathing to honest minded men, without being honorable enough to give her the chance to defend her good name. Oh, the cruel injustice of this world, and you, the champion of morality, most cruelly unjust of all!

SINGLETON. I am not unjust. Your name has been on everyone's lips.

STELLA. And what is that to me? The lips may be foul, when the name they seek to besmirch is pure.

SINGLETON. Pure! Can such a word be spoken by you—by Mary Carew?

STELLA. Yes—fearlessly, both by Mary Carew and by La Stella.

SINGLETON. You are trifling with me. You broke your troth.

STELLA. Therein judgment erred. But honor remained.

SINGLETON. You ran away with a wealthy seducer.

STELLA (*quietly*). A worthless man, an utterly worthless man.

SINGLETON. To become his mistress.

STELLA. That is false! I was his wife, his lawful wife.

SINGLETON. His wife! Whose wife? The world has never heard.

STELLA. Because I chose to keep my secret from the world.

SINGLETON. Tush!

STELLA. To keep my secret, so that I might save from shame, from the horrible knowledge of her true position, the lady the world spoke of, and now gratefully remembers as—Mrs. Henry James Garrison.

SINGLETON. My sister Grace!

STELLA. Your sister Grace! She was no wife, for Henry James Garrison was my husband.

SINGLETON. *Your* husband!

STELLA. Yes. But I spared your sister this revelation for her own sake, for her child's, but most of all for yours.

SINGLETON. What is this you tell me?

STELLA. I sacrificed myself so that the name of Singleton might suffer no dishonor—that you might be saved from humiliation and pain.

SINGLETON. Can this be true?

STELLA. It is true. Here is the proof—(*taking a paper from her bosom*)—the certificate of my marriage.

SINGLETON. Alas! Poor Grace! (*Reading the paper, and letting it flutter on the floor.*)

STELLA. It was with Henry James Garrison that I eloped in a moment of infatuation. We were married.

SINGLETON. Ah, married.

STELLA. We traveled in South America, but a few months later the heartless villain deserted me among strangers in a little village near Valparaiso, sick unto the point of death—so ill that it was only a miracle that snatched me from the grave.

SINGLETON. So retribution followed swift upon your folly, Mary.

STELLA. My punishment was deserved.

SINGLETON. The punishment was heavy.

STELLA. It was a year before I could drag my wasted form to Valparaiso. There I gained the friendship of a noble lady, Donna Peralta, and with her help, and in her company, nearly two years later, I succeeded in reaching New York. I saw my husband.

SINGLETON. When?

STELLA. On the day he died—within the very hour he died.

SINGLETON. Then you were the girl about whom my sister spoke?

STELLA. I was that girl. I conversed with your sister.

SINGLETON. And you did not disclose your name?

STELLA. No. As I have said, I preferred to bury my secret, for her sake and for your sake.

SINGLETON. Mary, this is a story of true heroism. Yours indeed has been a life-sacrifice.

STELLA (*in a voice of emotion*). After Mr. Garrison died, John, I fell ill again in New York, and when I recovered I fled away in dread of meeting you. Donna Peralta took me home with her again.

SINGLETON. Your protectress? To Valparaiso?

STELLA. Where she died a year later, my dear, noble, generous friend. And she left me all her wealth—her very name. Hence these “trappings of ill-gotten luxury” you so scathingly denounced.

SINGLETON. Forgive me, Mary. I spoke in ignorance.

STELLA. There is no need to tell you more of my story. You had married, and had gone out of my life, as I thought, forever. I wandered for years in the far East, from country to country, from city to city. I became interested in hypnotism as practised in that part of the world. I made it a study—a hobby—just to drown out the love and thought of you that still burned in my heart.

SINGLETON. My poor, unfortunate Mary.

STELLA. And, oh, John, I have fought so hard to stay away from New York—from *you*. Though we were parted, you continued to be all the world for me. I loved you ever, I longed for you again from the first hour of my repentance after committing the awful folly of my marriage.

SINGLETON. But you owed it to yourself to disclose this story to me long ago.

STELLA. No, no. There were other reasons. I was afraid to come near you. I thought you were happily married—your sister told me so that day we met.

SINGLETON. Well?

STELLA. I thought that any sign from me would only bring trouble into your life. So I kept far away from you—till now.

SINGLETON. I should have been glad to know that Mary Carew was not the worthless woman I believed her to be.

STELLA. Yes, but that knowledge might have brought regret to your mind. (*Pleadingly.*) You have sometimes thought of me, John, with feelings of regret?

SINGLETON. When I lost you, Mary, I was broken down with grief. Three years later, when I married, I admit that, even in spite of the wrong you had done me, you still had a place in my heart.

STELLA (*eagerly*). Yes, yes.

SINGLETON. I might not have married at all, perhaps, had not my friends urged me. They saw, they understood, that I was still brooding over the memory of the woman I had lost. In marriage they thought I would find happiness and consolation.

STELLA. And you have not found them, John.

SINGLETON (*frankly, looking her in the face*). On the contrary, I have been very happy.

STELLA (*in surprise*). Happy!

SINGLETON. The administration of my sister's bequest has given me a serious object in life.

STELLA. But love—love?

SINGLETON. Yes, my life has been rich in love. My sweet little wife has brought the sunshine into my days. But for her, I think, I should have turned into a gloomy-minded misanthrope.

STELLA. Your work in the slums—does she approve of that?

SINGLETON. Well, you have hit upon the one point about which we have agreed to differ. Ethel would have me keep out of the worst places—send relief, but at the hands of those accustomed to the crowded tenements of the poor. However, it is only her love and anxiety for me that make her feel that way.

STELLA. Then does she give any thought to the serious things of life?

SINGLETON. Ethel! Why, she is forever thinking of others—working for others' happiness, and always with an encouraging and hopeful smile. She carries brightness and joy wherever she goes.

STELLA (*aside*). He loves her—his face shows that he loves her.

SINGLETON. Ah, my dear little wife!—I often think I am far too dull and sober-minded a fellow for a gay and happy spirit like hers.

STELLA (*aside*). Thank God I learn all this—in time.

SINGLETON. But you shall know her, Mary. She will hear your story with deepest interest and sympathy. She will be your friend. She will try to bring to you some consolation for all the sorrows you have suffered.

STELLA. No, no, that cannot be.

SINGLETON. Your noble self sacrifice for my sake, for my sister's sake, will move her greatly. But—wait—Mary; that brings a thought into my mind. You are Mrs. Garrison.

STELLA. Do not call me by that name.

SINGLETON. Henry James Garrison died without a will. Therefore the fortune that Grace inherited, rightfully belonged, not to *her*, but to *you*.

STELLA. That question must never be reopened now.

SINGLETON. But I cannot consent to leave matters in this position. The funds I am distributing in accordance with my dead sister's wishes are yours.

STELLA (*weeping*). Continue to administer them, John. Be my bestower of bounty as you have been hers. Oh, my heart will break.

SINGLETON. Why do you cry like this?

STELLA. Oh, John, John, you cannot know, you shall never know what I suffer. But this night another dream, a vaguely whispered dream, has gone from me.

SINGLETON. What do you mean?

STELLA. Do not ask me any more. I thought your married life was other than it is.

(*She rises to her feet, looking faint.*)

John, I feel ill. Oh, God, why do I not die?

SINGLETON. Mary, Mary, you are faint.

STELLA. It is the old fever I suffered from in South America. It comes back to me at times. I feel my head swimming—my brain giving away.

SINGLETON. Can I do anything for you?

STELLA. Nothing, nothing. Tonight we part forever. But, oh, it is very hard. John, I have loved you so. I love you still.

SINGLETON (*softly*). You must not say that any more.

STELLA (*faintly*). Sometimes I think I could share your love with another, if there was only a little bit for me.

SINGLETON. You are not yourself when you speak like that.

STELLA. Pity me, John, pity me. Think of all I have lost.

SINGLETON. God knows I pity you, from the bottom of my heart.

STELLA. Then let me kiss you once, just once, my dear one, for the last time.

(They embrace; he bends tenderly over her, and she clings to him, gently sobbing on his breast.)

SINGLETON (*kissing her hair*). Mary, my poor, poor girl.

(SINGLETON'S back is to the curtained door. The curtains part. MRS.

SINGLETON'S figure is seen, for an instant, her face transfixed with horror. Then COUNT DE FAYE also appears in the background, as he stretches forward a hand to drag MRS. SINGLETON away. The curtains close. STELLA has raised her face.)

STELLA. What was that?

SINGLETON. Nothing. I heard nothing.

STELLA. But I saw a face there—between these curtains.

SINGLETON. You are fancying things. (*To himself.*) It is the hallucination of fever; she is wandering in her mind.

STELLA (*who has gone to the door, parted the curtains, and returns*). It was the face of—your wife.

SINGLETON. My wife here? Oh, Mary, dear, you are certainly not yourself. Let me ring for your maid. Let me send for a doctor.

STELLA. I saw your wife, John. And I saw *his* face, too.

SINGLETON. Whose face?

STELLA. Count Gaston de Faye's.

SINGLETON. Nonsense, nonsense! My wife with Count de Faye?

STELLA. Wait. Let me try to think. My mind is in a whirl.

(Sinks in a chair, burying her face in her hands.)

CURTAIN.

END OF ACT II.

ACT III

ACT III.

REPARATION.

SCENE: NIGHT IN COUNT GASTON DE FAYE'S BACHELOR FLAT, THE UPHOLSTERY, CURTAINS, ETC., OF WHICH ARE IN PINK.

The COUNT and MRS. SINGLETON are disclosed, the latter still wearing opera cloak, gloves, etc., just as she had been momentarily seen in the preceding act.

MRS. SINGLETON. Where have you brought me?

COUNT. Well, after what you saw, Mrs. Singleton, it was impossible for you to go home.

MRS. SINGLETON. Home! I have no home now.

COUNT. And, naturally, you were not equal to the ordeal of joining Mrs. Lennox's party at the opera.

MRS. SINGLETON. No; but I wish you to take me to Mrs. Lennox now, please, at once.

COUNT. But as Tannhauser won't be over for another hour yet, you must have patience a little while. I would advise you to make yourself comfortable here.

MRS. SINGLETON. And where is—here?

COUNT. May I help you off with your cloak? (*She draws back.*) No? Well, in any case, sit down. Let me give you a glass of wine. Your nerves are unstrung. (*He opens a small bottle of champagne.*) There! This will put new life into you. Nothing like a glass of dry champagne to pick one up when a nasty knock has come one's way.

MRS. SINGLETON (*pushing glass away, and her handkerchief falling beside it*). Whose house am I in?

COUNT. Well, my dear Mrs. Singleton, where would I have brought you for refuge—but to my own?

MRS. SINGLETON. These are your rooms? How dared you take this liberty with me, sir?

COUNT (*quietly*). Yes, these are my rooms. Do you like them? I chose those curtains because I know you are fond of pink.

MRS. SINGLETON. What do you mean? Oh, what have I done, what have I done—coming here—even for a minute?

COUNT (*tenderly*). You must rest. You are safe under my care.

MRS. SINGLETON. Count Gaston de Faye, you have taken advantage of my confusion of mind to bring me where I had no thought or intention of coming.

COUNT. After we left La Stella's, you told me to take you—anywhere.

MRS. SINGLETON (*bitterly*). After we left La Stella's.

COUNT. So I brought you here, Ethel.

MRS. SINGLETON. What right have you, sir, to call me by that name?

COUNT. Here to my home—to the home which may be—

MRS. SINGLETON. Oh, I am beginning to understand. You would make this despicable use of my great sorrow. Let me go from this house.

COUNT. No, Ethel, no. You shall not go till I have told you—that I love you.

MRS. SINGLETON. Love—love—you speak of love to *me*?

COUNT. Yes, I love you—with all my heart and soul. I have loved you for months past. I first thought you to be forever beyond my reach. But latterly I have begun to hope—because—because—

MRS. SINGLETON. Oh, I did nothing to deserve this shame.

COUNT. Because I knew your husband to be faithless.

MRS. SINGLETON (*fiercely*). My husband faithless! No, no, no! A thousand times no!

COUNT. You saw with your own eyes tonight.

MRS. SINGLETON. I cannot believe what I saw—what you suggest. There is some mystery—some horrible deception. Mr. Singleton will explain everything. Let me go away at once.

COUNT. Where?

MRS. SINGLETON. To my husband.

COUNT (*with a slight sneer*). At La Stella's?

MRS. SINGLETON. Yes, even at La Stella's. Only let me see him. Let me ask the explanation I should have asked there and then—which you prevented me from getting by dragging me away.

COUNT. I only wanted to save you from humiliation before her, and to avoid a scene. What is the use of having scenes, Ethel? (*He approaches her.*)

MRS. SINGLETON. Don't come near me. Oh, how foolish I have been.

COUNT. You followed the only course left open to you. Dear one, will you not listen to me? What is your husband's love as compared with mine?

MRS. SINGLETON. Do not presume to put yourself in comparison with him.

COUNT. Your cold and unemotional husband—to *you*, at least. With La Stella, of course, it is different. In her case the passion latent within his breast shows itself.

MRS. SINGLETON. Do you call yourself a man to torture me like this?

COUNT. Oh, you'll understand better when I tell you one thing more. Do you know who La Stella really is?

MRS. SINGLETON. Don't let me hear that woman's name again.

COUNT. You will still more dislike hearing it when you know the whole truth. La Stella is his old sweetheart.

MRS. SINGLETON. What?

COUNT. The girl to whom he was engaged before he married you.

MRS. SINGLETON. Mary Carew!

COUNT. Yes, Mary Carew, who betrayed him once, but returns to him when the chance of a piquant intrigue comes her way.

MRS. SINGLETON. Ah, she was false *then*; she will be capable of anything *now*.

COUNT. So you see the lovers resume their old billing and cooing, and you—are left out in the cold.

MRS. SINGLETON. Oh, who could have believed such a thing possible?

COUNT. Therefore, to return to your question, why shouldn't I place myself in comparison with a husband who treats you so? Why do you repulse me, when I offer you *my* passionate love? Be proud and brave, keep your own knowledge and your own counsel, and let us love each other in secret. Pay your faithless husband out in his own coin; let him have a taste of the hoodwinking he practices and which he himself so richly deserves. Leave him to go his own way—to follow his own devices. Let us follow ours. And neither your husband nor the world need be one penny the wiser.

MRS. SINGLETON. Oh, what an abominable suggestion!

COUNT. Well, if you won't have it that way, we'll fling prudence to the four winds of heaven. Come with me tonight, Ethel. Let us go far away from New York to California, Japan. I'll shield you from all the world, my darling—sacrifice everything for your sake. Ah, you do not know how madly I love you.

MRS. SINGLETON. Silence, sir, now and forever. After the loathsome things you have just spoken, I wish never to see your face again.

COUNT. Do not trample on my love.

MRS. SINGLETON. Your love! Don't degrade the word by letting it pass your lips.

COUNT. You despise me?

MRS. SINGLETON. Yes, I despise you, as I would the meanest pickpocket in a jail. My husband treated you as an honorable man, trusted you by admitting you to the intimacy of our home. You ate at his table, you were introduced to his friends. And you would repay him now with the most despicable act of treachery possible for one friend to commit against another. You cur!—you miserable cur!

COUNT. Ah, when love consumes a man's heart, he does many things he might not otherwise do.

MRS. SINGLETON. The meanest of mean excuses—a coward's plea! But enough. There can be no more talk between us. Understand me, Count Gaston de Faye, I am going from this house—now—instantly. And no one must ever know that I have crossed your door.

COUNT. That depends.

MRS. SINGLETON. Depends? What do you mean?

COUNT. I have told you that I am devoted to you. I have laid my heart and my life at your feet.

MRS. SINGLETON. I have forbidden you to speak on that subject.

COUNT. But since you fling my love back in my face——

MRS. SINGLETON. Well?

COUNT (*coolly*). Well, you see, I must try and find something to compensate me for my disappointment.

MRS. SINGLETON. I fail to grasp your meaning.

COUNT. You know quite well that I hold a secret affecting your husband's reputation.

MRS. SINGLETON. His reputation is not in your hands.

COUNT. No, it will pass out of my hands, when all the world comes to talk about his intrigue—the vulgar intrigue of this great moral reformer—with the notorious La Stella.

MRS. SINGLETON. Intrigue? I cannot yet believe it. There is some hideous mistake.

COUNT. Perhaps; perhaps not. But I am also now in possession of an important secret of yours—a secret that can decide your whole future.

MRS. SINGLETON. What insinuations will you be making next? What secret of mine have you ever possessed?

COUNT. The secret of the honor you now confer upon me——

MRS. SINGLETON. What? What?

COUNT. In visiting me in my apartments, Mrs. Singleton.

MRS. SINGLETON. Oh, horror, what *have* I done in coming here?

COUNT. In plain language, you have compromised yourself.

MRS. SINGLETON. Compromised myself?

COUNT. That is the word. But don't get agitated, don't give way. Everything can be pleasantly arranged. Come; I'll be perfectly frank. I had begun to hope that your life might have entered into mine; that secretly we might have loved each other; that my interests might have become your interests; that you might have performed important services for the man you loved.

MRS. SINGLETON (*shrinking away in dismay*). Wretch!

COUNT. But since I have misjudged your feelings toward me, all that must, I suppose, be dismissed as an idle dream.

MRS. SINGLETON. A wicked revolting dream. Oh, dear God, dear God, that any one could have ever thought such things of me.

COUNT. Well, while love takes unto itself wings and flies away, another thing yet remains. You can still perform for me at least one of the important services I had in my mind.

MRS. SINGLETON. I loathe you. I want to have nothing whatever to do with you.

COUNT. A little service, which will be of great advantage to yourself—which will save your good name.

MRS. SINGLETON. I do not know what you mean.

COUNT. Presently, you will comprehend. I shall drive you straight to your home now.

MRS. SINGLETON (*gladly*). Ah!

COUNT. And on my word of honor no one will ever know that you have visited my rooms.

MRS. SINGLETON. Oh, that is good of you.

COUNT. No doubt, your husband will have some explanation about that little—ahem!—episode at La Stella's—an explanation which apparently you will be glad to accept and believe. Then everything will be put right between you. I shall do my best to help to this happy result, by promising to remain silent about the La Stella affair as well.

MRS. SINGLETON. Now you speak like your better self, Count.

COUNT. Provided, Mrs. Singleton—provided— There is, you see, a condition attached to my offer—

MRS. SINGLETON. A condition?

COUNT. I shall drive home with you. Mr. Singleton will still be—shall I say, at the social club in the Bowery? You have a key, I happen to know, to the strong box that lies upon Mr. Singleton's desk.

MRS. SINGLETON. How did you learn that?

COUNT. Oh, never mind. Well, in that box there is a memorandum book bound in red morocco and itself fitted with a lock and key.

MRS. SINGLETON. Where have you got all this information?

COUNT. Everything will be as I have said, provided you give that book into my hands. I want that book.

MRS. SINGLETON. Rob my husband, sir?

COUNT. Poof! It is nothing. He will never know how the thing came to be lost.

MRS. SINGLETON. You would have me steal for you a book which I myself am pledged never to open—indeed, to throw into the fire should my husband die or should there be the slightest chance of its falling into other hands. That is the only reason why I have a key to the box which holds this book and its secrets. Yet you would have me betray the trust thus reposed in me by my husband.

COUNT. Well, you betray him now by being in my rooms.

MRS. SINGLETON. How dare you say that?

COUNT (*shrugging his shoulders*). The world will say it, which comes to the same thing.

MRS. SINGLETON. You would let a mean, base lie like that go forth to the world?

COUNT. That is for you to decide, Mrs. Singleton. You have been here for half an hour by the clock. If your husband chooses to make a fuss about it, I cannot prevent this scandal.

MRS. SINGLETON. My husband will believe my story; he will know that I have done nothing of which I need be ashamed.

COUNT. Doubtless he will credit your story, when you are so ready to accept his. But what about other people? It will make a fine tale for the newspaper retailers of delectable gossip—all about the philanthropic and highly moral Mr. Singleton compromised with the notorious adventuress, La Stella,—

MRS. SINGLETON. Spare me, spare me.

(*The faint ring of an electric bell outside is heard.*)

COUNT. And the wronged wife making this the excuse for running away with the French Count whose reputation for gallantry stands—well—excuse my saying so—pretty high.

MRS. SINGLETON. You villain! Merciful heavens, what am I to do?

COUNT. If you will not re-consider the whole question, and consent to love me, Ethel,—

MRS. SINGLETON. I would die first.

COUNT. Then, that this unpleasant alternative may be avoided, let us drive to your house, and get that harmless little book. There the whole matter will end.

(*Knock at the door. BROWN enters timidly.*)

BROWN (*in low tone, to COUNT*). Please, sir.

COUNT. Did I tell you I was not to be disturbed? How dare you disobey?

BROWN. I can't help it, sir. The lady knows you are here, for the elevator boy let it out that you had come home.

COUNT. Confound him! Who is the lady?

BROWN. Madame Peralta, sir.

COUNT. La Stella!

BROWN. Yes, sir. I have almost had to force her to wait outside, till I could bring you warning that she is here.

COUNT. What does she want?

BROWN. She says she will bring men to break in the door, sir; she will call the police, if you don't see her immediately.

COUNT. Good God! She must have guessed something. There is going to be a scene.

(*The electric bell outside rings long and peremptorily, and louder now that the room door is open.*)

MRS. SINGLETON (*frightened*). What is that?

COUNT. It is all right; don't be alarmed. (*Aside to BROWN.*) Take this lady to my writing room. Lock the door, and bring me the key.

BROWN (*surprised*). Lock her in, sir?

COUNT. Yes, man. Obey my orders. Quick.

BROWN (*with a smile*). All right, sir. I understand.

COUNT (*to MRS. SINGLETON*). There is a little complication.

MRS. SINGLETON. I only want to get away from here.

COUNT. Unfortunately you cannot, just for the moment.

MRS. SINGLETON. Cannot?

COUNT. A friend—some friends of mine have arrived—they are on the landing outside. If you leave now, you will certainly be recognized. Then, of course, I shall be powerless to stop the talking, however truly willing I may be to serve you.

MRS. SINGLETON. Oh, this is cruel, this is cruel. That my thoughtlessness should have let me into all this terrible trouble!

COUNT. Well, just keep a cool head.

(*The bell outside rings again.*)

There, you see my visitors are growing impatient. Go with my man here. He will take you to my writing room. When the coast is clear, I'll smuggle you away.

MRS. SINGLETON. I am in a false position, a horribly false position. Oh, for a friend to help me.

(*Bell rings once more.*)

COUNT. Go at once. For your own sake, go.

MRS. SINGLETON (*moving to door*). Good heavens what am I committed to now?

COUNT (*aside, to BROWN*). Then show Madame Peralta in here. Say I am alone.

(*Exeunt MRS. SINGLETON and BROWN.*)

(*Coolly.*) After all the fright may do my lady good. When I choose to release her, she will have made up her mind to accept my terms. Now for La Stella. What the devil can have brought her here? Something must have happened. I'll need all my nerve. (*Fills and drinks a glass of champagne.*) That's better. Now I feel fit for everyone and everything.

(*Re-enter BROWN. LA STELLA follows. She pauses at the door, and looks round the room.*)

BROWN. Madame Peralta. (*Aside to COUNT.*) The key, sir.

(*COUNT puts key in pocket.*)

STELLA. You are alone, Count de Faye?

BROWN (*at door*). Something's going to drop, that's certain.

(*Exit.*)

COUNT. Ah, my dear Stella, to what do I owe the pleasure of this—unexpected—visit?

STELLA (*advancing, abruptly*). Where is Mrs. Singleton?

COUNT. Mrs. Singleton? How should I know the whereabouts of Mrs. Singleton?

STELLA. Do not trifle with me, sir. I ask again—where is Mrs. Singleton?

COUNT. Really, my dear Stella, are you not a little foolish coming to me in this theatrical way, and harping on a question I have already answered?

STELLA. You have not answered.

COUNT. I have given the only reply that is possible. When a man of honor—

STELLA. A man of honor!

COUNT. Is questioned in regard to the whereabouts of a lady, he maintains a discreet silence.

STELLA. By speaking like that you insinuate vile things.

COUNT. I insinuate nothing. I am simply—dumb.

STELLA. How dare you try to make me believe that there is any secret between you and Mrs. Singleton?

COUNT. I may be interested in the lady.

STELLA. You have the audacity to say that?

COUNT. You can hardly deny that you are also interested—in her husband.

STELLA. You make that retort—you fling that taunt at me?

COUNT. And why not? What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. You love your John Singleton.

STELLA. Ah!

COUNT. And, perhaps—I admit nothing, remember—I may love his wife.

STELLA. You infamous scoundrel!

COUNT. Don't use strong language, my dear Stella. Such words from you are like a boomerang. They come back, and hit yourself. What may be infamous in my case is just as infamous in your own.

STELLA. I begin to see things. But I will not parley with you. I ask again, and for the last time—where is Mrs. Singleton?

COUNT. And again I reply—I cannot give you the information you desire.

STELLA. Do you pretend ignorance? Then let me tell you one thing I have already learned.

COUNT. And what is that?

STELLA. You brought Mrs. Singleton to my house tonight.

COUNT. Well, when you make such confident assertions, what need is there for me to answer you at all?

STELLA. You cannot deny facts.

COUNT. I deny nothing. I affirm nothing. If you choose to address me in this peremptory fashion, I prefer to treat your questions with the silent contempt they deserve.

STELLA. Contempt! You would treat me with contempt, sir—you who have stooped to bribe a poor, misguided servant girl?

COUNT. What's that?

STELLA. Babette, my maid, has confessed everything to me.

COUNT (*under his breath*). The damned cat!

STELLA. So, Count Gaston de Faye, you have been carrying your secret service system so far, that you have had spies in *my* home—to bring you the tittle-tattle of my daily life.

COUNT (*with a forced laugh*). Which has all redounded to your credit, my dear Stella.

STELLA. Don't attempt to pay me compliments, which coming from you I despise. But make up your mind to this, Count de Faye,—your career in this city is at an end.

COUNT. You don't want to prevent me from doing my duty to my country?

STELLA. Your country. If you are a Government spy, why should you have made that the cloak for other infamy?

COUNT. But why not understand each other, Stella?

STELLA. An understanding with *you*—with such a man as *you*?

COUNT (*sneering*). Well, you found me useful in putting in train your little affair with Mr. Singleton. Is it not rather ungrateful to cast me off after your own ends are served?

STELLA. God forgive me! I might have known that, when I touched pitch, I should be defiled.

COUNT. Well, as I say, let us understand each other. You have your beloved John. Leave Ethel to me.

STELLA. Leave a woman like that in your villainous clutches?

COUNT. If it please her, what have you got to say? Listen to reason. Does it not smooth the road for your own plans?

STELLA. Good heavens! You would make me your accomplice in crime! I now see the diabolical conspiracy you have worked. You have brought my life again into contact with John Singleton, so that—

COUNT. For your own happiness.

STELLA. No; for the accomplishment of your own infamous designs against an innocent woman.

COUNT. Pshaw! Innocent women are scarce commodities in this world.

STELLA. You coward! Your sneers are only contrived to carry suggestions that are as wicked as they are untrue. But there, I should be wronging Mrs. Singleton if I believed her, for one moment, to be capable of listening to your odious proposals. She has been, so far, your dupe; but as there is a God above she shall not be your victim.

COUNT. You should have been on the stage, Stella.

STELLA (*intensely*). Where is Mrs. Singleton?

COUNT. Go back and ask that of—your friend—her husband.

STELLA. I warn you. You have a chance to save yourself—by preventing a miserable scandal. I came here to give you that chance.

COUNT. It was a pity to interrupt your own pleasant—little love scene.

STELLA. Mr. Singleton has driven home to see if his wife is there.

COUNT. I hope he may find her.

STELLA. No; I was afraid she would not go home. But listen. He will then enquire for her at the Opera House.

COUNT. After which, I suppose, he will think it best to console himself by returning to you.

STELLA. No; he will come here. If he does not find his wife, he is to follow me to your address.

COUNT (*to himself*). The devil he is!

STELLA. And then, Count Gaston de Faye, accounts will be settled between us all. And for *you* there will be a bitter reckoning.

COUNT. Chut!

STELLA. I will denounce you for what you really are—a spy in foreign government employ!

COUNT. Hush! You have sworn to keep my secret.

STELLA. And the breaking of my word in such a case can be only counted as a deed of righteousness.

COUNT (*fiercely*). You will think better of this. Even if I lie to accomplish it, I will blast your reputation for ever.

STELLA. My reputation is beyond the reach of your calumnies.

(*Sounds of a scuffle outside the door are heard.*)

COUNT. What is that?

STELLA. You have lost your opportunity. Mr. Singleton has arrived.

COUNT. Then, by God, let it be a fight to the bitter end.

(*Enter SINGLETON, flinging BROWN aside.*)

SINGLETON. Damn it, don't try to block my way.

(*Enter DR. BRIDGES and MRS. LENNOX.*)

BROWN. The fat's in the fire, right enough. Skidoo for me.

(*Exit.*)

SINGLETON. Ethel?—where is Ethel?—have you found her?

STELLA. Not yet. But do not be afraid, Mr. Singleton. She is safe.

MRS. LENNOX. Count de Faye, what has become of Mrs. Singleton?

COUNT. Really now, you all honor me too much by coming to me with such enquiries.

MRS. LENNOX. Ah, I knew there was trouble brewing. I have suspected you for days past.

SINGLETON. Pardon me, Mrs. Lennox. Leave this man to me.

COUNT. "This man," sir!

SINGLETON. Yes, we shall speak plainly to each other, Count Gaston de Faye.

COUNT. I refuse to be insulted in my own house.

SINGLETON. For insults there will be all necessary satisfaction, at the proper time and place. Meanwhile, you have to explain certain things to me, sir. First and foremost, where is my wife?

COUNT. Even if I could, I most assuredly would not answer any question put to me in that way.

SINGLETON. Then I shall break every bone in your body, you miserable hound.

STELLA. Stop, Mr. Singleton. I think I can gain more by quiet means than you will by threats or by force. Count de Faye, we understand each other.

COUNT. Had you been wise, we might have understood each other.

STELLA. And if you are wise now, you will take your last chance of saving the situation—for all of us.

COUNT (*sullenly*). How should I know where she is?

STELLA. You need not prevaricate any longer. You see your scheme has failed.

COUNT. I shall do exactly what I choose. As I said before, the question you put to me with damnable reiteration is not one that can be answered by a man of honor.

STELLA. For goodness sake, do not parade that phrase again.

SINGLETON (*trying to get at him, but held back by DR. BRIDGES*). You villain, how dare you make such an infernal innuendo?

BRIDGES. Keep your temper, Singleton. Leave everything to La Stella. Trust to La Stella.

STELLA (*smiling*). Did I not know your character, Count, so well as I do, your wicked insinuation might have alarmed me. But Mrs. Singleton is safe. You have only got to tell us now where she is to be found.

COUNT (*cowed*). And if I do?

STELLA (*to the COUNT aside*). If you help to save her name from being tarnished even by the breath of slander, if you put her right by confessing the miserable trick you have played, if you go away from New York, if you never cross our paths again,—

COUNT. Then?

STELLA. Then I may keep your other secret from the world.

(MRS. LENNOX *has picked up* MRS. SINGLETON'S *handkerchief*. *She closely examines it.*)

MRS. LENNOX (*to herself*). It is hers.

(*She beckons to* DR. BRIDGES. *They whisper together.*)

BRIDGES (*to* MRS. LENNOX). Are you sure?

MRS. LENNOX. Yes, yes; see, here are her initials.

(SINGLETON *has observed, and advances to her. In her first impulse* MRS. LENNOX *seeks to hide the handkerchief.*)

SINGLETON. Let me see what that is.

BRIDGES. Be calm, Singleton; for God's sake be calm.

SINGLETON (*taking the handkerchief*). What is this? Good heavens, it is my wife's.

STELLA. She has been here! Count de Faye, you have not done this monstrous thing? You did not bring her here?

COUNT (*doggedly*). This is a free country. If Mrs. Singleton has been my visitor, she came of her own free will, I presume.

SINGLETON. Let me kill the man. Let me strangle him with my own hands.

STELLA. No, no. Do not take his insults and innuendoes seriously. It is because he sees himself beaten that he indulges his vindictiveness in uttering them. There is no harm done, and I have still one means of bringing him to his knees.

(DR. BRIDGES *opens the door, and peeps out.*)

BRIDGES. Hush! Listen!

MRS. SINGLETON (*voice muffled, in the distance*) Help! help!

SINGLETON. It is Ethel!

(*He rushes from the room. An instant later, the crash of a door being broken in is heard.*)

MRS. SINGLETON (*outside*). Oh, John! John!

SINGLETON (*outside*). Ethel, my darling, my little wife.

STELLA. Thank God, she is saved!

COUNT (*to* STELLA). You will hold to your promise? Otherwise, I will drag you all down in my ruin—yes, Singleton and his wife, and you as well.

STELLA. You need not threaten. If I show you the slightest mercy, it will only be to save them from annoyance.

(*Re-enter* SINGLETON *and* MRS. SINGLETON.)

MRS. SINGLETON (*sobbing*). John, my dear husband, you will not misjudge me.

SINGLETON. No, no, dearest. I know that everything will be explained.

MRS. SINGLETON. He brought me here—I did not know where I was coming—from La Stella's—where—Oh!—(*bursting into tears*).

SINGLETON (*pressing her to his breast*). Yes, yes, little one. Where you saw me in circumstances that require an explanation.

MRS. SINGLETON. But there *is* an explanation, dear husband? Oh, I knew, after a few minutes' reflection, that it was all some wretched misunderstanding.

SINGLETON. Everything will be made clear, dear. Meanwhile, here is someone who will comfort you.

(*LA STELLA advances.*)

MRS. SINGLETON. The lady from Paris! Madame Guichard.

STELLA (*with a smile*). La Stella.

MRS. SINGLETON (*shrinking away slightly*). La Stella!

SINGLETON (*fervently*). One of the best and noblest women breathing. Love her, Ethel, as you once loved my sister, Grace. Let her be your sister from this day, for, as you will learn, she has done us a service that can never be repaid.

MRS. SINGLETON. Oh, forgive me. I have only to look into your face to know that you are good. I have been foolishly jealous.

STELLA. You have been cruelly deceived.

MRS. SINGLETON. Yes; he made me believe that you had stolen my husband's love.

STELLA (*caressing her hand*). Poor little heart!

MRS. LENNOX. Ethel, dear, I am so thankful everything has come right. But why did you not confide in me?

(*They embrace.*)

SINGLETON (*sternly looking at the COUNT*). And this man? What of him?

STELLA. Let him take himself away. It is best so. His chastisement at your hands would only make the world talk. And, alas, we all know, the world has a malicious and a slanderous tongue.

MRS. SINGLETON. But I must speak, for I am all in a maze. John, he would not let me go from here, unless I promised to open your strong box.

SINGLETON. Open my strong box!

MRS. SINGLETON. And give him the secret memorandum book you keep there.

SINGLETON (*looking at Stella*). God above! Is that what the man is?

COUNT (*aside*). Curse it!—given away!—and by *her*!

STELLA (*to SINGLETON*). You know it now—without my speaking the word.

SINGLETON. Oh, let us hear. What do you think him to be?

STELLA. A spy—a secret agent of his government.

SINGLETON. Not on your life! If you have believed that, he has thrown dust in your eyes, too. I can tell you exactly what this man is; I know the breed well. He is nothing more nor less than a professional blackmailer—a common or garden blackmailer.

ALL (*murmuring*). A blackmailer!

SINGLETON. That is why he schemed to get possession of a note book of mine which contains some secrets that might have been worth a barrel of money for him.

STELLA. And I was so blind!

BRIDGES (*with a smile, to MRS. LENNOX*). So thought-reading has its limits, eh?

MRS. LENNOX. The creature! I don't suppose he is any more a Count than my chauffeur.

BRIDGES. Probably not.

(*A momentary pause, all eyes fixed on the COUNT, who stands crushed and silent.*)

SINGLETON. De Faye, or whatever your name may be, a transatlantic liner sails tomorrow morning at ten o'clock. You will be on board. You have the chance between that or—the Tombs.

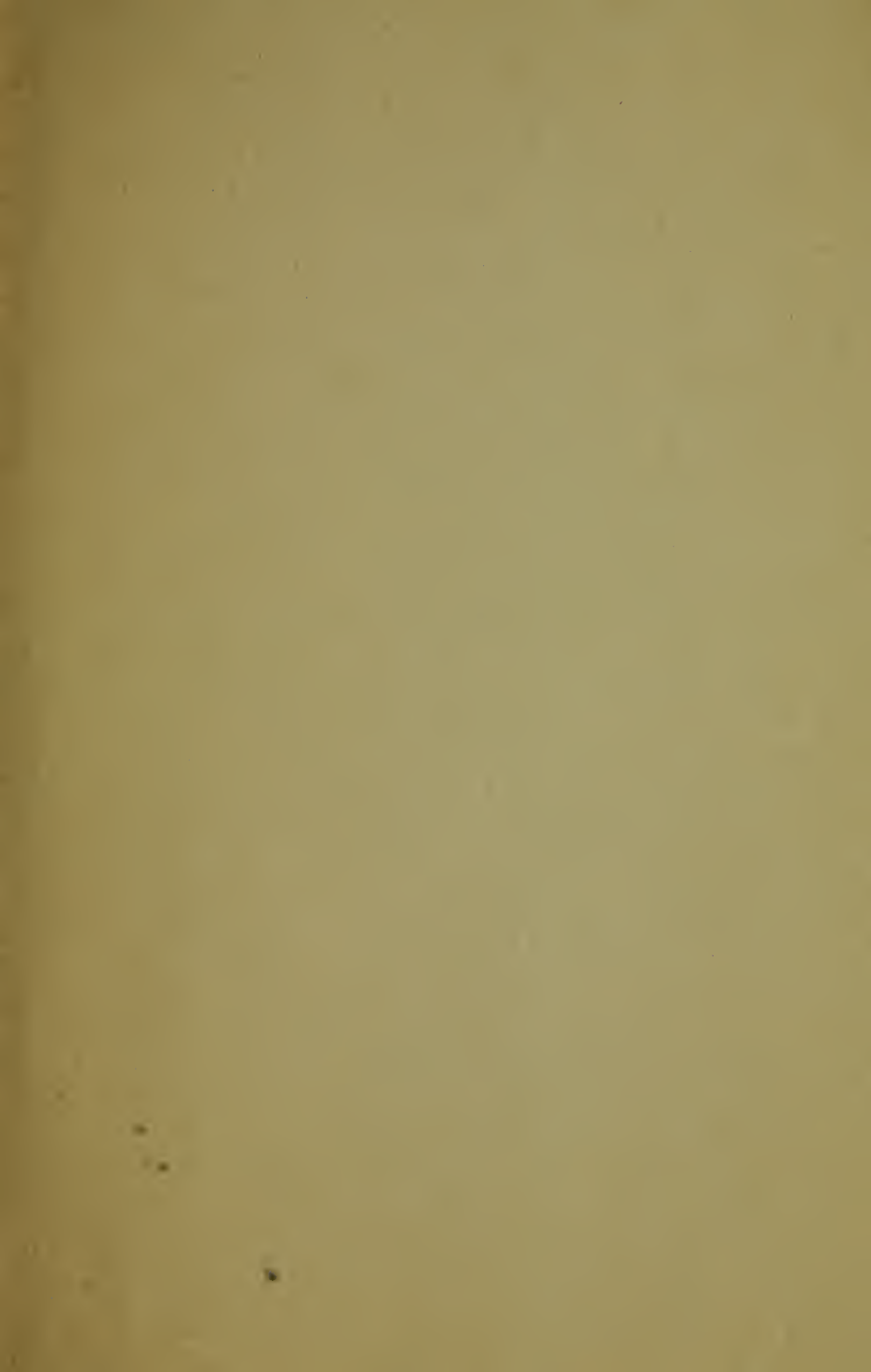
(*The COUNT hangs his head in abject acquiescence.*)

CURTAIN.

END OF PLAY.



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